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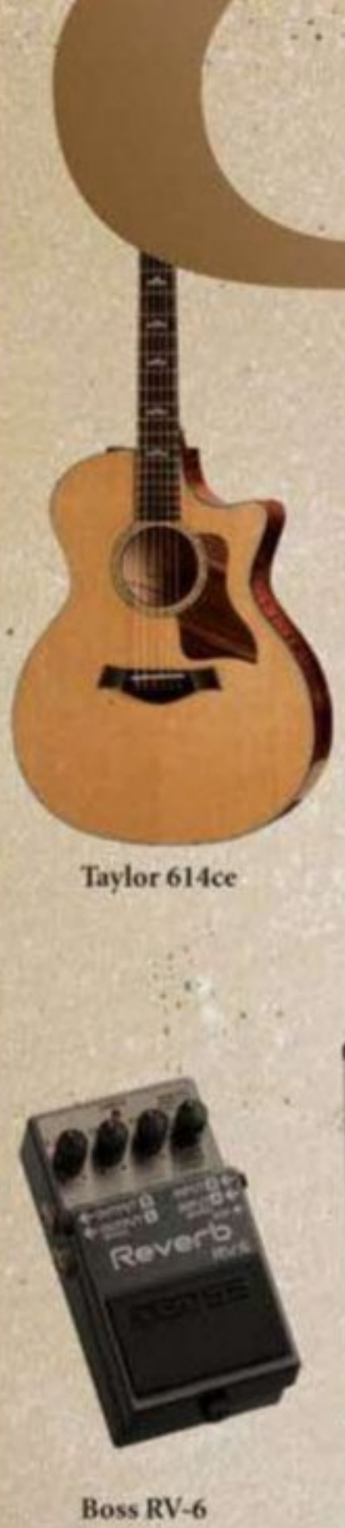

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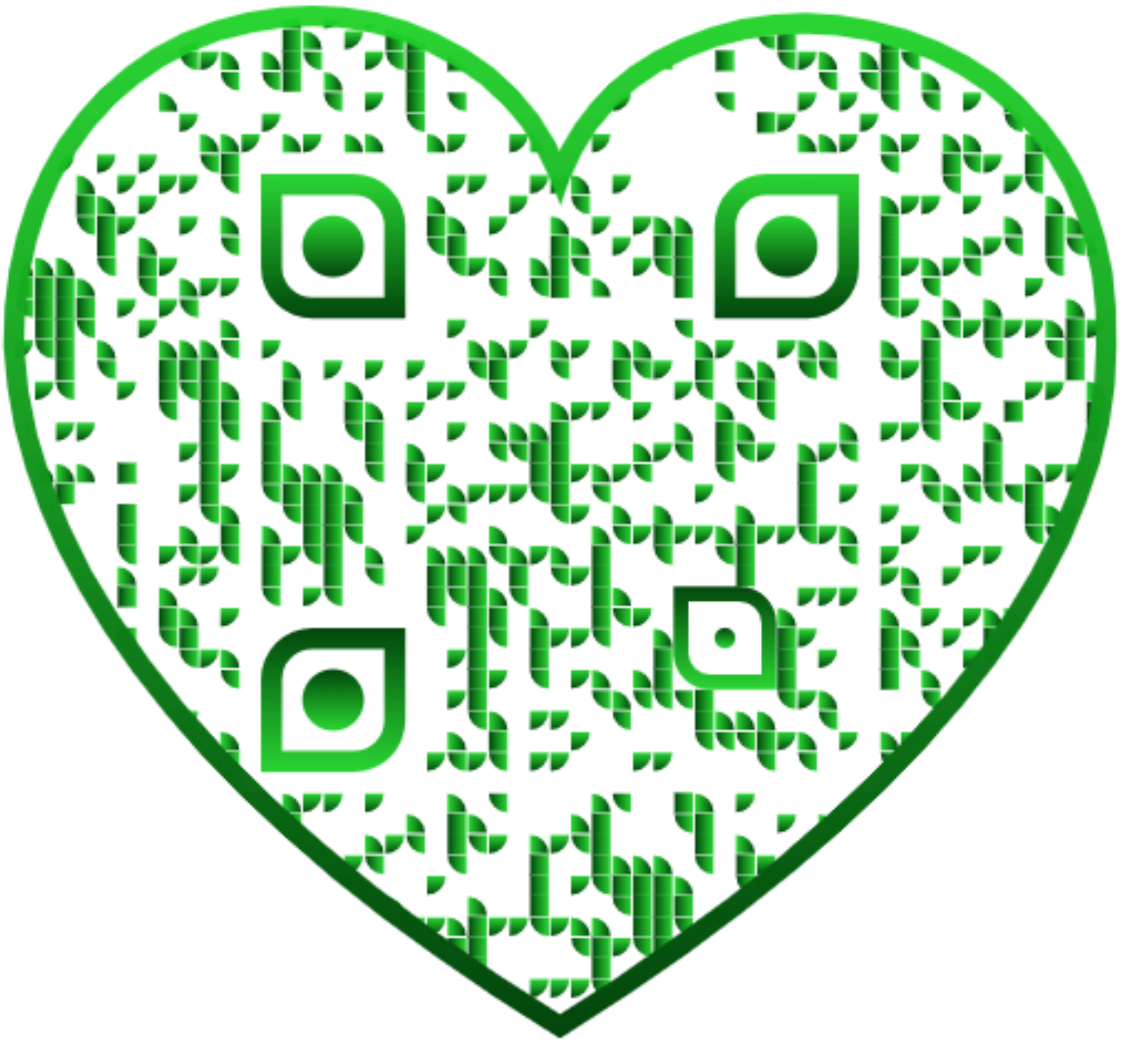

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Compliments of the season

As 2015 draws to a close and we reflect on the year in guitar, it's impossible to overlook the passing of the musical legends that we've lost in the last 12 months – Andy Fraser, Chris Squire and of course BB King, to name but a few. Their influence will remain vivid for decades to come, but they'll be sadly missed by those who knew and admired them.

On a happier note, some pretty damn desirable guitar gear has been dragged up the *G&B* office stairs by the postman in 2015. We round up the best of it in our Gear Of The Year awards from page 19 onwards, and you too could be a winner if you turn to page nine and enter our competition, in which we're giving away a swanky Gretsch archtop.

What will 2016 bring for guitar players and bassists? As always, January will see us packing our bags and heading to the NAMM Show in sunny Anaheim where we'll be reporting on the hottest product launches for the year ahead. Will recent trends such as extended-range instruments, mini pedals and faux ageing continue? Stay tuned to the live coverage from the show at www.guitar-bass.net and on our social media channels to find out.

Finally, at this time of year it would be remiss of me not to point you in the direction of our subscription offer on page 52 – we really can't think of a finer Christmas present for your nearest and dearest! See you in 2016...

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Turn to **page 52** to take advantage of this month's special *Guitar & Bass* subscription offer.

In this issue...

THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

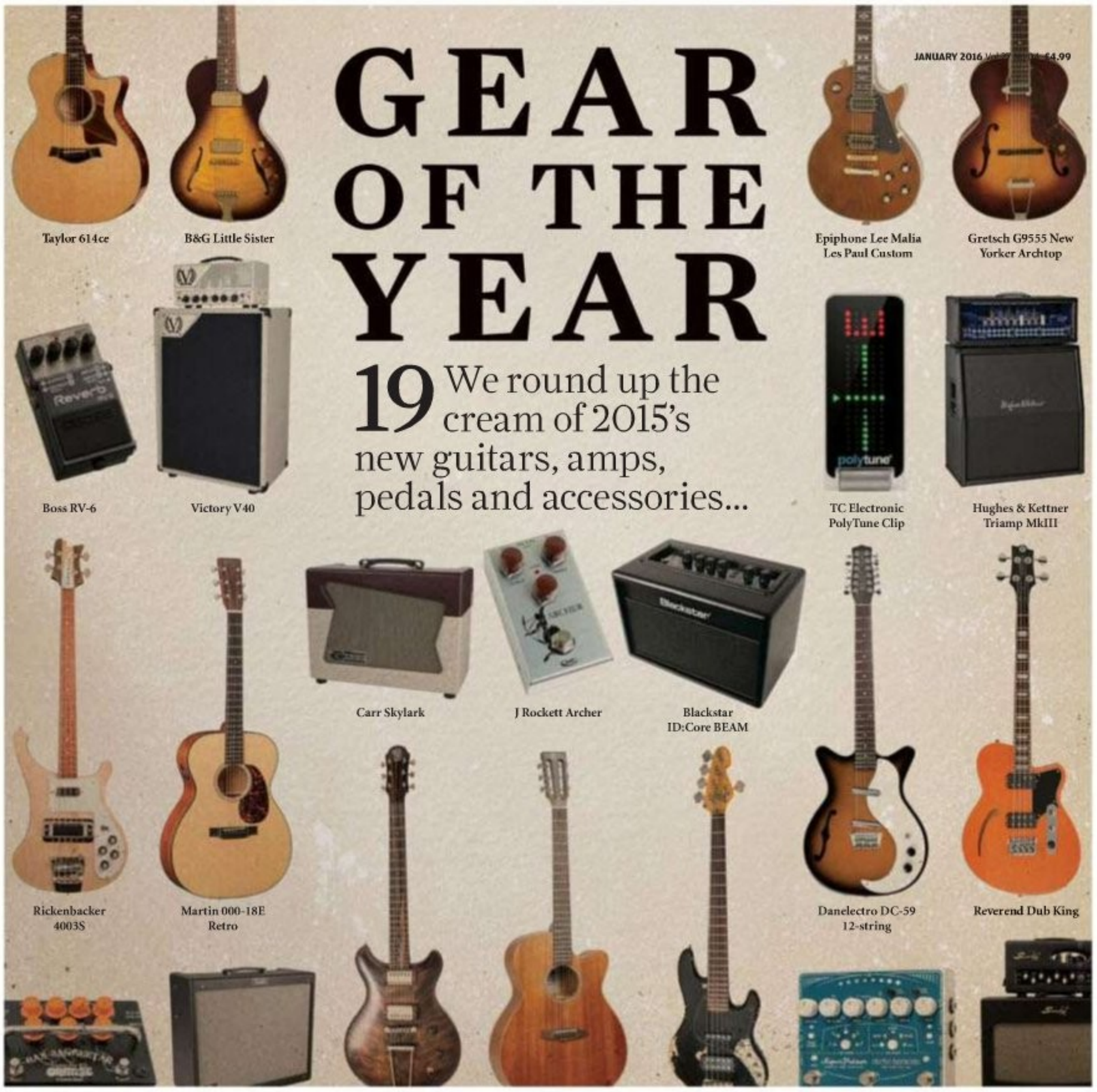
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 10.

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and Nick Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker.



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Opening bars...

Emerging talent on *G&B*'s radar and the sad passing of an industry legend

ONES TO WATCH

Aidan Knight

CANADIAN SINGER-SONGWRITER WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM HIS FRIENDS

Aidan Knight's third album *Each Other*, set for release in January, is a compelling, multi-layered record, adeptly conjured with the backing of a collective of musicians from jazz, classical and avant-garde backgrounds.

The 29-year-old from Vancouver Island's poignant tales are backed by compositions rife with invention – shifting time signatures, thoughtful arrangements and doleful brass and piano parts combine to make *Each Other* a dark yet absorbing listen. It's reminiscent of another Canadian artist – Dan Mangan – who burst into indie music's collective consciousness with his stunning album *Club Meds* a year ago, and the pair are long-term friends and collaborators.

"We're all friends in the band and I'm lucky my friends also happen to be great players. My last record was the first time we'd all got together and tried our hand at writing songs. Before that it had been more of a solo project. There are a few songs I wrote myself, but bringing them to the band it ends up expanding further than I'd be able to do on my own. The basis of *Each Other* is live performances of us in a room together."

A big part of Knight's philosophy on *Each Other* was using affordable guitars. "I think the over-arcing theme was it was played on guitars that are not that expensive, played through pedals that are not that rare," Knight says. "I found a little bit of liberation from not being so focused on gear and more on playing the best we could.

"I used extremely cheap guitars – the Squier J Mascis, I've had a lot of compliments after the shows we've played, people saying 'I thought I was reading Squier on the headstock and I couldn't believe it because it sounded really good'. I think there's something charming about being able to get a lot of sound out of guitars that are available to everyone. If I'm known for anything it's that I played a lot of Guilds in the past. I have a Guild T100 and a Guild M-65 Freshman. I played a lot of Jazzmaster on this album and took a few tricks from Nels Cline – his double-speed recording stuff."

That cost-conscious approach didn't necessarily extend to amps and pedals on *Each Other*, however...

"We mostly used amps from the studio," says Knight. "Because I mostly cover all of the guitar, I try to play out of one Class A/B amp and one Class A amp. There's something sonically great about having two different amps producing sound. I used the Silverface Deluxe Reverb and then on the other side alternated between a Gibson GA-12 and a Silverface '71 Princeton and an Epiphone EA-22 RVT. I love that amp.

"We used a lot of Echoplex tape delay, that's one of my all-time favourite effects. I used a Russian Big Muff, Earthquaker Devices Tone Reapers... the Fairfield Circuitry drive pedal is like a Neil Young kind of saggy, amp on the verge of blowing up sound, with a starve control. For some of the soundscape-type stuff, I use a Line 6 M9 because of all the looping features, so I can forward, reverse, half-speed and double-time loops."

Montreal-born Marcus Paquin was selected for production, following his work with Arcade Fire, The National and Stars. "Marcus came highly recommended, and when I started digging into his résumé it was a no-brainer," says Knight. "His work on The Suburbs and the last National record, with Local Natives and Stars, his stuff is great. Also, from a guitar perspective, he plays in a band called Little Scream and he's a great player."

Knight will set out on a five-date UK tour in March, and we can expect to see more of the Canadian and his band in the future. "I'm looking to spend more time in the UK, we just love playing there," he enthuses. "We love touring Canada, but it's massive and it just takes it out of you, driving 10 hours a day between the major cities. It's a little bit more manageable to come across and play London, Bristol, Manchester, Leeds..." **GW**

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The National, Dan Mangan*

GEAR *Aidan Knight*

- **GUITARS** 1986 Greco SG, 2014 Squier J Mascis Jazzmaster, 1959 Guild T-50
- **PEDALS** MXR Micro Amp, EHX Russian Big Muff, Earthquaker Tone Reaper, Fairfield Circuitry Barbershop, EHX Memory Boy, EHX Small Stone Phaser, Echoplex EP-3, TC PolyTune, Line 6 M9
- **AMPLIFIERS** (Live) 1971 Princeton Reverb, 1965 Epiphone EA22 RVT. (Studio) Silverface Deluxe Reverb, Gibson GA2, Filmosound Modified Projector Tube Amp

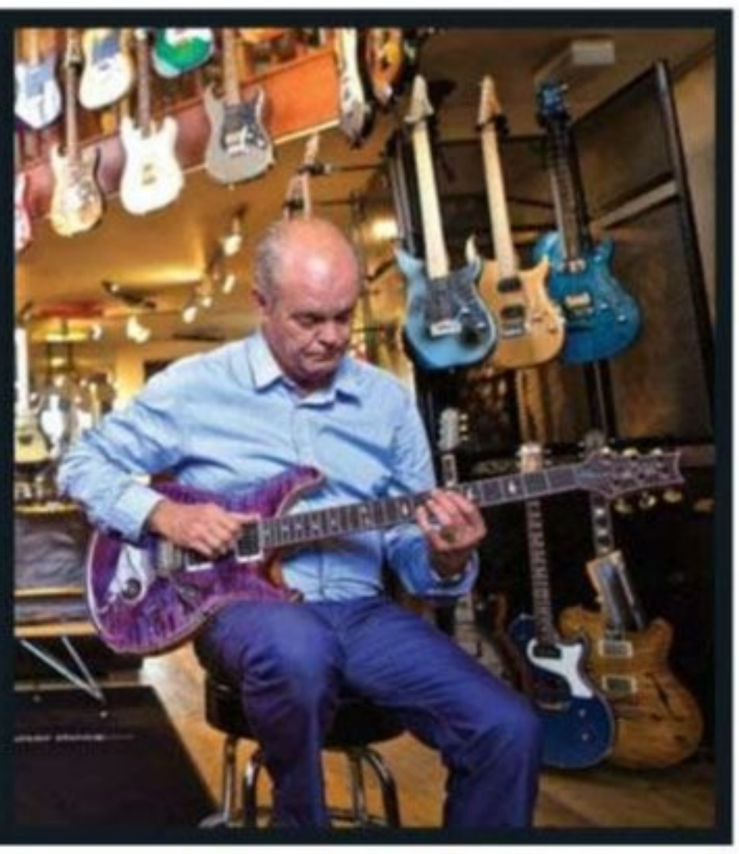
JEFF PUMFRETT 1959-2015

Tributes are being paid to World Guitars owner Jeff Pumfrett, who passed away recently at the age of 56. A hugely popular figure in the guitar industry, he also launched Machinehead Music and worked at Arbiter in the 1980s. Born in Southend, Essex, after working in the fruit and veg trade Jeff began his career in the musical instrument industry at Arbiter when it was the UK distributor for Fender. He met his first wife, Debbie, at the company and they married in 1981.

Jeff progressed from Arbiter to launch Machinehead Music, Harlow in 1983, along with brother Jim and Debbie, going on to buy KET Guitars and launch Machinehead Hitchin before selling the business in his late 40s after 23 years in control and retiring to Ireland.

Jeff returned to England in 2008 to buy World Guitars in Gloucestershire from old friend David Gregory. Jeff married his second wife, Lilya, in 2010. Along with sidekick Mark 'Smiffy' Smith, he went on to establish World Guitars as one of Europe's leading high-end guitar retailers.

A passionate golfer and lover of fast cars, Jeff was known for his honesty and keen sense of humour and will be sorely missed throughout the industry. G&B's sincere condolences and best wishes go to his family, friends and colleagues at World Guitars.



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The G9555 was launched at NAMM 2015, an electrified version of the original Gretsch 6050 New Yorker. This Grand Auditorium-style hollowbody archtop features stunning retro looks and a recreation of the DeArmond Rhythm Chief 1000 pickup. It has an arched solid spruce top finished in a glorious satin sunburst with laminated maple back and sides and a chunky vintage-style v-shaped mahogany neck. The New Yorker was the winner of the best electric under £1,000 category in *G&B*'s 2015 Gear Of The Year awards after our review concluded it was "a genuinely inspiring archtop at a great price, that screams 'play me'. This guitar has songs in it!"

To be in with a chance of winning the New Yorker, visit www.guitar-bass.net/comps/gretschny and answer the simple question:

Q **In which city was the Gretsch company founded?**

A Newport **B** New York **C** Newcastle upon Tyne

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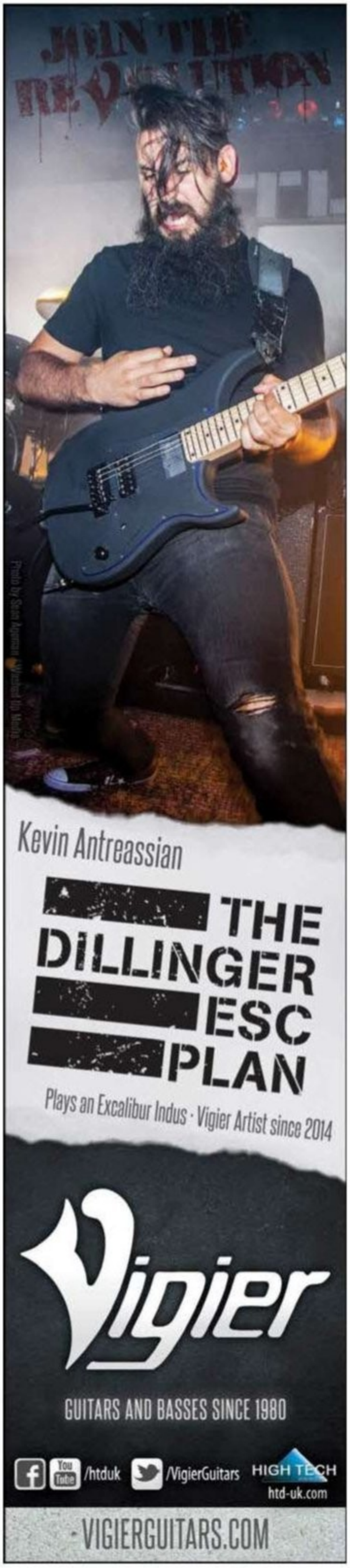

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Letters from America

The Satellite Amps Gammatron is a diminutive box with spartan design, but as **DAVE HUNTER** discovers, it's a cranked-up tone monster

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

Fans of guitarist Jonny Two Bags from seminal hardcore outfit Social Distortion are likely to have twigged Satellite amps in the guise of the Atom that this grind merchant has sported for several years now. The straightforward 4x EL84-based, 36-watter has won fans thanks to his endorsement, yet Satellite remains well under the radar among touted boutique makers, even with other notable players such as John Reis (Rocket From The Crypt), Ron Heathman (Supersuckers), and Dennis Casey (Flogging Molly) having joined the team. It's hard to say why this might be, but this maker from San Diego, California, seems content to fly along on word of mouth, and busy enough in the process. To wit, Satellite main man Adam Grimm tells me he has recently been inundated with orders for the company's latest model – the diminutive Gammatron, on review here – and had 50 orders in a single month recently, which is quite the load for a small shop building custom hand-wired tube amps. Will the added exposure of all those little Gammatrons soaring out into the world be enough to raise Satellite's profile? We'll see. Meanwhile, if you're a fan of no-nonsense, wired-to-your-fingertips tube tone you might want to explore Satellite further for yourself...

Like the flagship Atom model, the Neutron (the Atom's 18-watt brother), Barracuda (a 45-watt dual-KT66 grinder), Mudshark (20 watts from two 5881s) and a handful of others all share Satellite's ethos: simplicity. You'd expect it from something like this Gammatron – and you get it – but the fact that seven of this little combo's eight guitar-intended siblings carry only volume and tone controls in addition to their high and low inputs tells us something about Satellite's purity of focus (Grimm has said he's considering removing the tone knob from all of the above in future, so players don't have so much control over his amps). I've admired the same type of spartan design from the likes of Dr. Z, Benson, Goodsell and Matchless, and experienced the fact that often the less you cram in between input and output, the more tone you retain. Satellite amps go there, too, and none more so than this cute box of crank-up. This one doesn't even have a pilot light (something I feel, frankly, it could use for the added couple of bucks in parts costs), but you'll know it's on soon enough.

The Gammatron is built into a rugged powder-coated chassis about the size of a deli sandwich

Then again, the issue with the pilot light might simply be, "where would you put it?" The Gammatron is built into a rugged powder-coated chassis about the size and depth of a generous deli sandwich. Hand-wired point-to-point, like the larger Satellites, it does use one terminal strip for support, but mostly exhibits components wired one to the other, like you'd find inside an old Gibson or Supro from the early days of amplification. Capacitors and resistors are all top-notch, with carbon comps for the latter positions other than the power and output-bias stages, and just two Mallory coupling caps in the entire signal chain. The transformers are equally elite – custom-spec'd for the Gammatron's needs and hand wound by Mercury Magnetics in California – and include a notably oversized output transformer

KEY FEATURES

Satellite Gammatron 1x8" combo

- **PRICE** From $489 for a cab-less micro-head to $689 for the combo, with options in between (approx. £320 - £450 plus shipping and any duties)
- **CONTROLS** Volume, tone
- **OUTPUT** 2.8 watts
- **TUBES** One 12AX7 preamp tube, one 12BH7 preamp tube used as output stage
- **FEATURES** None!
- **SPEAKER** 8" Celestion Eight 15, 4 ohms
- **DIMENSIONS** 11"x13"x6"
- **WEIGHT** 12lbs
- **CONTACT** Satellite Amplifiers **satelliteamps@aol.com**

Through a 2x12-inch cab, the Gammatron proved to be all kinds of rock 'n' roll fun

(you'd mistake it for the power transformer before observing which wires go where underneath the bonnet). The tubes are a single 12AX7 in the preamp and a 12BH7 in the output, but other nine-pin preamp tubes such as a 12AT7, 12AU7, 12AY7 or 5751 can be used in the output stage with differing results, and the two can even be swapped. The speaker is a single 8-inch Celestion Eight 15, rated at 4 ohms, but I'm told the output transformer can happily handle 8- and 16-ohm loads.

Fired up with a Telecaster, a Les Paul and a Strat, the Gammatron revealed bags of pliant, responsive, harmonically rich playability. No, it's not going to cut a gig un-mic'd, but it's also a ton of fun through a 2x12-inch cab, delivering juicy, organic rock 'n' roll goodness that makes you want to play and play. Pushing this kind of air through the bigger speakers, the Gammatron's 2.8 watts was enough to disturb the family downstairs from my attic studio above, and it positively roars with an Analogman Prince Of Tone or a Gas FX Drive Thru overdrive engaged. Plugged back into its own 1x8 cab, however, the Gammatron returns to being truly bedroom-compliant, yet stick a decent mic in front and it tracks beautifully, with a thick, creamy tube overdrive tone that belies the tiny bottles inside. As such, in addition to being a lot of fun in the 'bedroom amp' category (and one of the most affordable handmade-in-the-USA boutique amps I've ever found), it's a great tone tool to stick in any application that might previously have demanded a Fender Champ, Vox AC4 or any other petite single-ended combo.

I've been playing a lot of larger amps lately, usually using an output attenuator or Fryette's Power Station to rein them in. This is the first amp I've played in some time that I wanted to boost for much of my playing time, but that's no bad thing. When I got over my taste for raw volume, I realised how sweetly dynamic and trenchant the Gammatron's tone really is. How, in other words, it encapsulates so much of what so many of us seek in a tube amp, without the need to rein it in. I will say that, fun though it is, the 1x8-inch combo version sounds inevitably rather boxy. Can't be helped. It's still worth having for the cuteness factor, and the ability to just plug and play and keep volume to a minimum. Otherwise, the head option might do you just as well, stuck through an appropriate cab to maximise the Gammatron's potential. Then there's the grin factor of using the re-amping function of something such as the Power Station or a Bad Cat Unleash to ramp up the volume to gig levels. Splice some higher-wattage, big-iron power to this touch-sensitive goodness and you're floating on an entirely different sphere.

Opposite **The Gammatron packs a single Celestion Eight 15 speaker**
Above **Like all Satellites, the Gammatron is hand-wired point to point, and sports just a pair of valves**

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GUITARLINGTON 2015

The Arlington Guitar Show in Texas is the most important event in many a vintage guitar enthusiast's calendar. **DAVID PLUES** was there...

This year's Arlington Guitar Show, aka Guitarlington, was a huge success for traders and the public alike, with 2015 notable for the number of 1958-60 Gibson Les Paul Standards on sale. The market for vintage instruments is still strong for good examples, as evidenced by the huge number of clean guitars on offer at the show between Fort Worth and Dallas. All the favourites were available at high but realistic prices, with some buyers acquiring 40-50 guitars each over the weekend, further underlining the health of the vintage market.

The Les Paul Forum, led by Mike Slubowski, Tom Allen and Charlie Daughtry, had a stand at the show for the first time. With contributions from Tom Wittrock and forum members, they also had a very impressive collection of Bursts. It represented an opportunity to speak to some of the greatest sources of Burst knowledge on the planet.

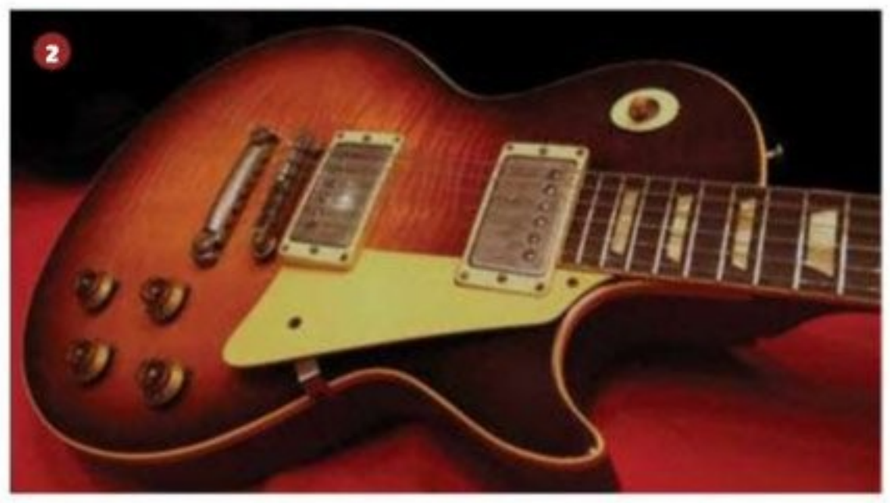
Drew Berlin, the 'Burst Brother', had four Bursts on display. His stand in the carpeted hall was a magnet for fans and there were ample opportunities to handle and inspect the guitars. Eric Ernest from Abalone Vintage had the 1959 'Memphis Mojo' on show, and this guitar, with all its 'crazy paving', was an eye-opener. The super-clean 1958 Burst from Gary's Classic Guitars, meanwhile, was in stark contrast to Memphis Mojo, with a perfect, flawless finish.

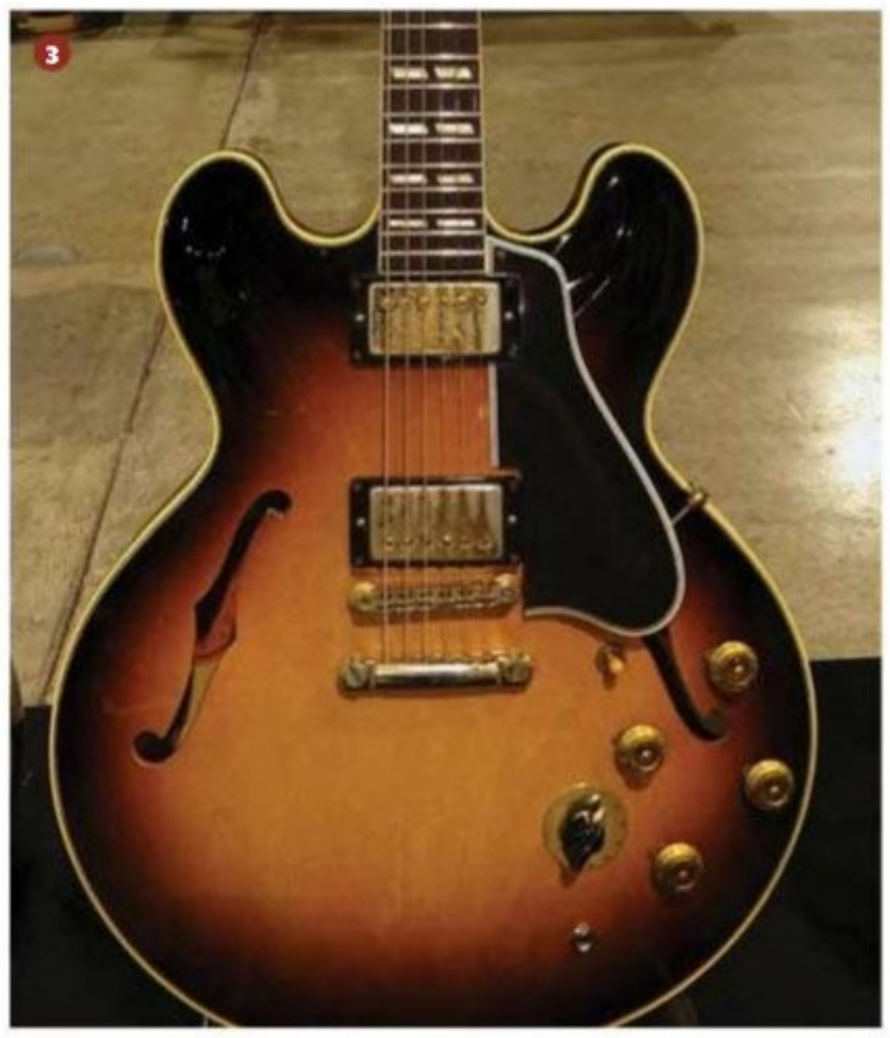
As the images in this report illustrate, this was a show for fans of a wide variety of guitar and bass brands. There were more than 10,000 instruments on display, with prices to suit all budgets. Heritage Auctions had a room that featured items set to go under the hammer at the company's next auction in Los Angeles, including a huge collection of Danelectro guitars, Mike Bloomfield's 1963 sawn-off Telecaster, and Danny Gatton and Roy Buchanan Telecasters. The Danny Gatton Les Paul Custom with magic Dingus control box was another rare piece of guitar history. The highlight of the auction preview was a fine Bigsby guitar. These instruments are now fetching prices as high as Bursts – and this one, with an estimate of $200,000, was no exception.

Armand Serra, the UK-based collector, had an impressive stand to promote the launch of his two-volume book detailing his private collection. The title not only features great new photographs, but also includes all-important stories from previous owners and explains how Armand acquired the guitars.

I was asked by Eric Ernest of Abalone Vintage if I wanted to see something special and he duly produced from under the table a 1937 Gibson ESH-150 twin-neck in superbly clean condition. This is an incredibly rare piece that Eric will reveal much more about in a future issue of *Guitar & Bass*.

Arlington remains something of a Mecca for vintage fans, and if you make plans to fly out and attend the show next year, you will not be disappointed – just be sure to remember to take a good supply of dollars!





1 Clean-looking Fenders were as popular as ever 2 Drew Berlin's stand – one of three great Bursts 3 ES-345 with long guard in fine conditon with a hefty price tag 4 Jazz and Precision basses 5 Gibson ES-175 – a good price and very clean 6 Gary's Classic Guitars had a fine selection of Fender, Gibson, Gretsch and Rickenbacker guitars 7 Lifton cases were fetching high prices 8 1959 Burst, Sandy, played and admired by Joe Bonamassa 9 1964 Sonic Blue Strat 10 A lovely 1960 Burst from Gary Hernandez 11 Tom van Hoose, author of the *Super 400* book with a 1999 guitar hand built by Bob Benedetto 12 Drew Berlin (Burst Brother) proudly holds his copy of the *Vintage Electric Guitar Bible* 13 Tele Custom in wonderful condition 14 David Plues plugged into a Two-Rock prototype 15 Memphis Mojo 9-0821 16 '56 Goldtop with dark back 17 More clean-looking Jazzmasters

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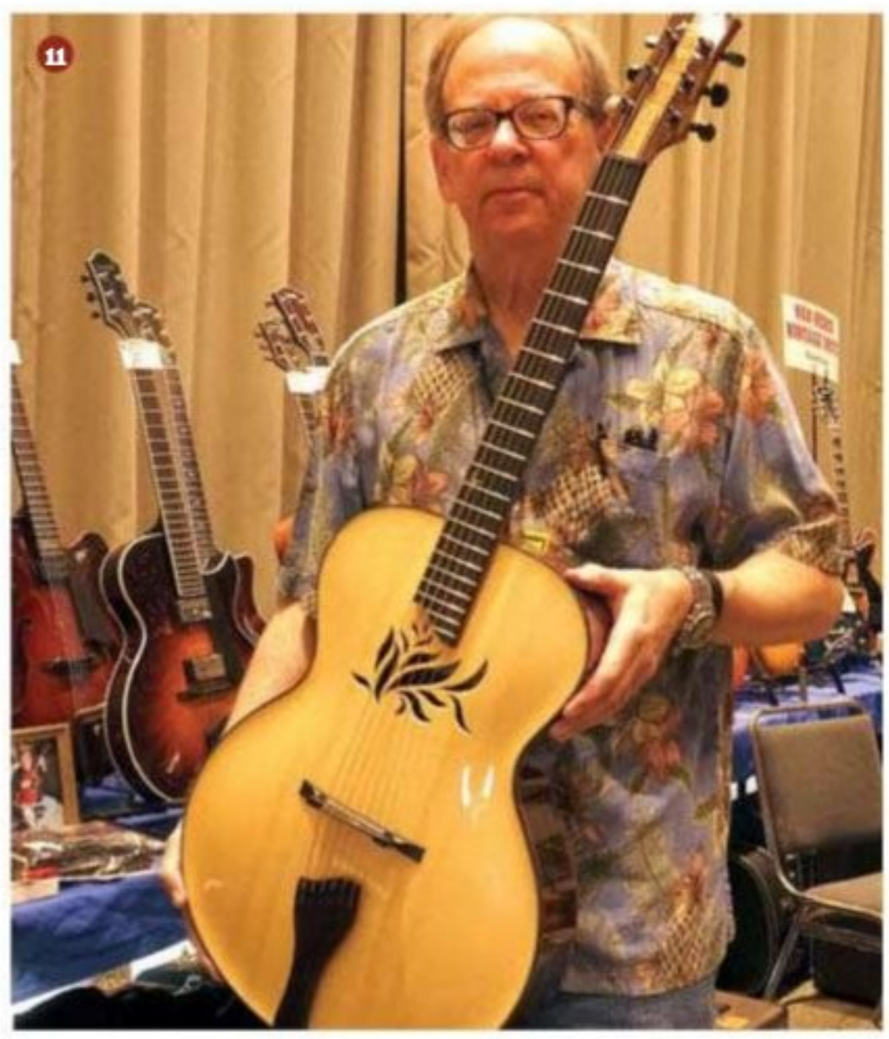

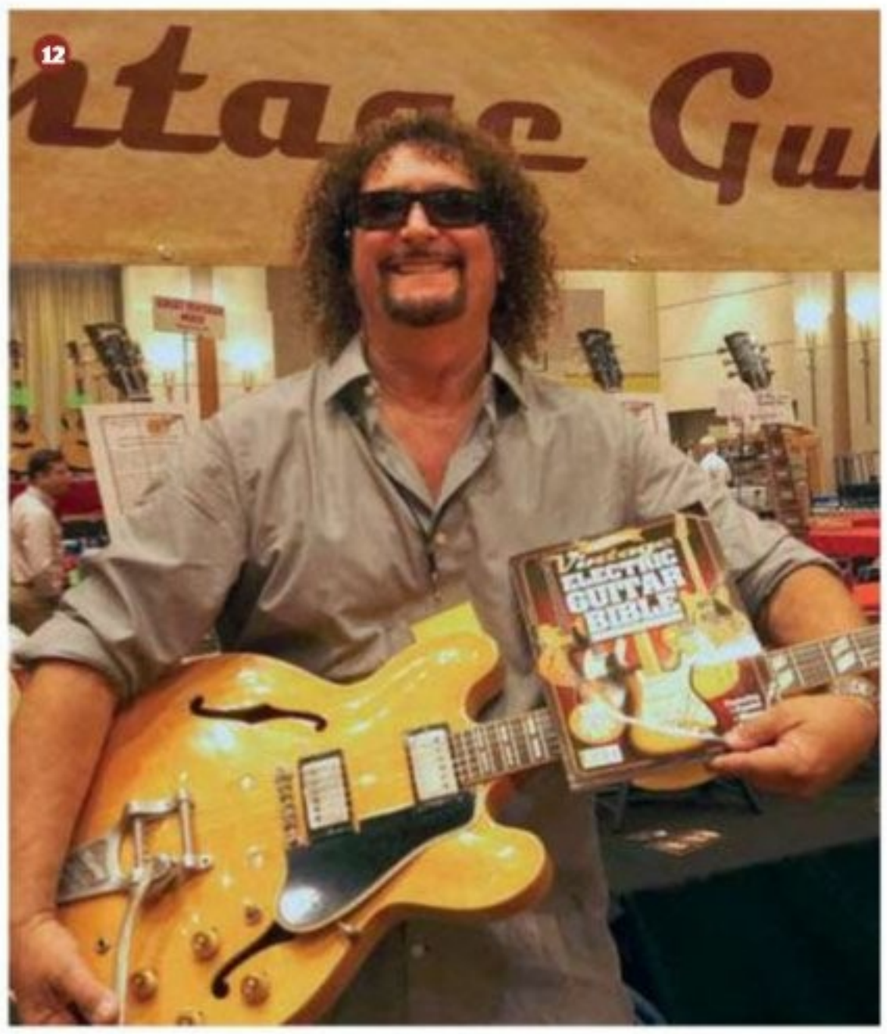

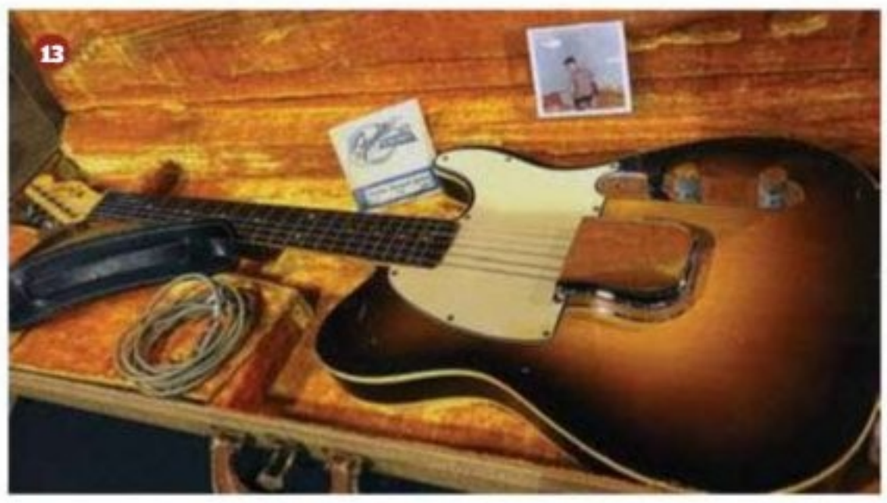

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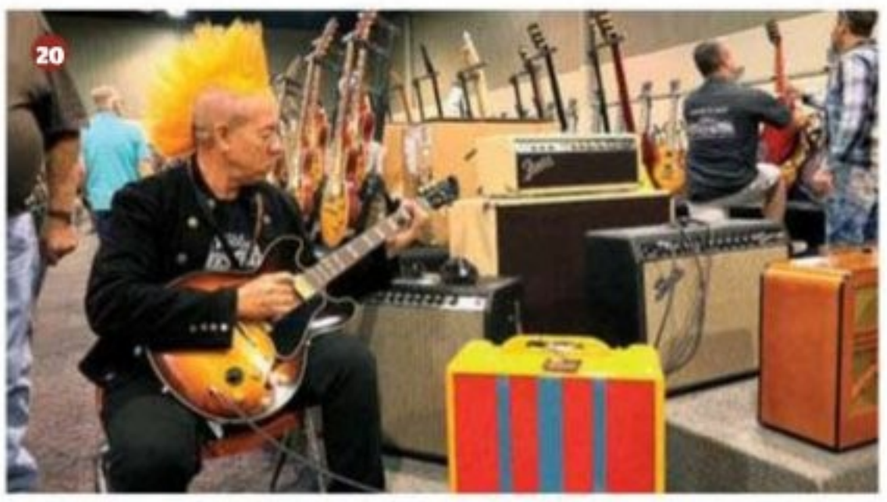

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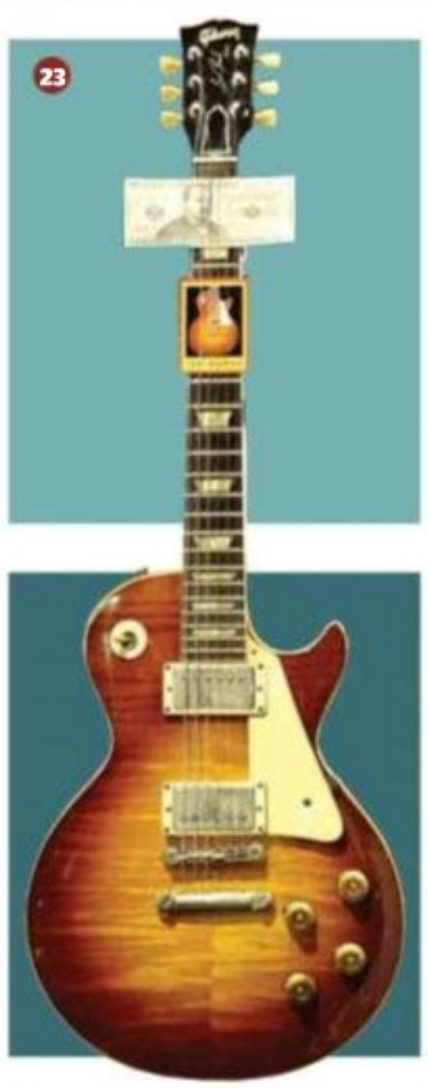

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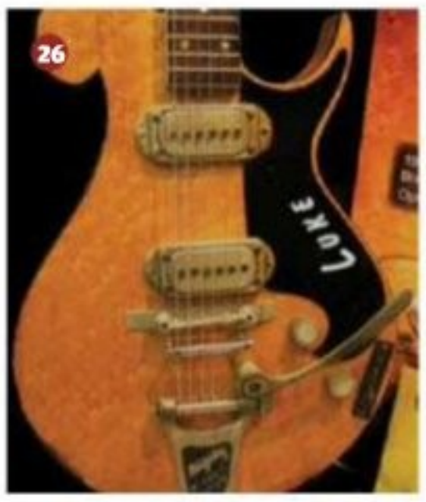

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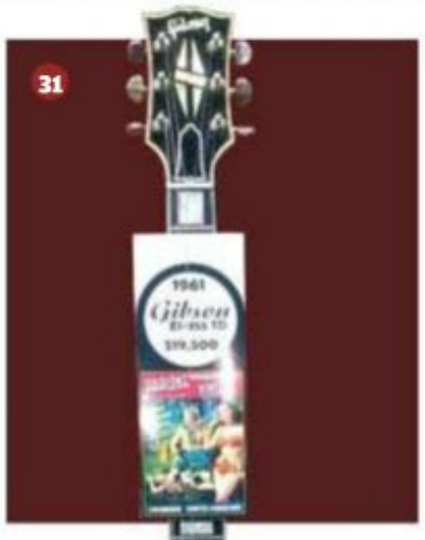

18 More Fender beauties 19 Heritage Auction Danny Gatton 1961 LP Custom and Magic Dingus control box 20 Chris from Fullers of Houston and his impressive hair 21 Tom Wittrock original Burst refinished to a high standard 22 The Les Paul Forum stand 23 9 1923 aka Donna 24 Doug Carroll with 85512 25 A super-clean 1956 Strat with the original case candy 26 Original Bigsby instruments are now fetching Burst prices 27 Eric Ernest of Abalone Vintage with Memphis Mojo 9 0821 28 Sandy was on dislay on the Les Paul Forum stand 29 Collector's Choice and 9-1923 30 Tele heaven 31 1961 ES-335 32 Highly-prized vintage tuners 33 Heritage Auction Roy Buchanan Tele 34 One of the best '58s, Moonburst, with an incredible top full of colour and fire 35 Heritage Auction Mike Bloomfield Tele 36 Vintage Princetons are always in high demand 37 High-end acoustics 38 Eric Ernest's ESH-150 1937 twin-neck

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Taylor 614ce

B&G Little Sister

Carr Skylark

J Rockett Archer

Blackstar

Gretsch G9555 New Yorker Archtop

Boss RV-6

Victory V40

GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015

It's that time of year again; across the next 10 pages we've rounded up the cream of the guitars, basses, amps, effects and accessories featured in the magazine over the last 12 months. All come highly commended, and indeed recommended, by our good selves, and in each category we've crowned an overall winner.

How did we decide? First, our expert panel of reviewers sat around a table and argued long and hard into the small hours. There were raised voices, a few tears and blood was even spilt, but that's perhaps not unusual when you consider that at least two of the *G&B* team originate from South Wales.

Once we finalised the shortlist, our votes were cast, after which we let you have your say in a public poll on **guitar-bass.net**, which accounted for 50 per cent of the weighting on the final results. Before you spend another penny on gear, turn the page and read onwards. It's one hell of a shopping list...

TC Electronic PolyTune Clip

Hughes & Kettner Triamp MkIII

Rickenbacker 4003S

Martin 000-18E Retro

Danelectro DC-59 12-string

Reverend Dub King

Orange Bax Bangeetar

Fender Hot Rod DeVille ML 212

Patrick James Eggle Macon Carved Top

Tanglewood TW130SMCE

Sandberg California TM5

Electro-Harmonix Super Pulsar

Swart Spac Tone 45

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BEST ELECTRIC GUITAR

OVER £1,000

The explosion in boutique guitar manufacture in recent years has not only provided well-heeled guitarists with more choice than ever, it has also put pressure on the big boys to keep highly desirable works of guitar-shaped art rolling out of their factories. If you are armed with a four-figure budget, check out this trio of must-try electrics that stole our hearts in 2015...

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 WINNER

PRS S2 Vela

- **PRICE** £1,404
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 10
- **CONTACT** PRS Europe 01223 874301 www.prsguitars.com

The S2 project was launched in 2013 with the aim of producing affordable PRS electrics in the same Maryland facility as the company's 'Core' line. The S2 ranks were expanded this year to include the first offset-body PRS, the Vela, a guitar very much in the retro spirit of the Mira and Starla rather than the figured-top bling most readily associated with the brand.

With a silhouette created by bisecting a Custom outline and shifting the bass side forwards and redrawing the lines, the Vela brings another first to the PRS catalogue in the shape of its Type-D neck single coil, described by PRS's Jim Cullen as a cross between a '54 Strat and a DeArmond Dynasonic. Sonically reminiscent of the in-vogue Gold Foil, the Type-D has a wonderful voice for slide, effected atmospherics, fuzzy riffs and plenty more besides.

Throw the raunchy bridge pickup and chunky, Plate-Style bridge into the mix and the Vela is as robust and road-worthy as it is sleek and toneful. Whether or not street prices meet your definition of 'affordable', the Vela is a fantastic guitar for the money, and arguably the coolest PRS to date.

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 HIGHLY COMMENDED

B&G Little Sister

- **PRICE** £2,950
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 02
- **CONTACT** The North American Guitar 0207 835 5597 www.bngguitars.com

This Israeli-made collision between a Gibson ES-140 and a parlour acoustic made us all rather weak at the knees thanks to its superlative combination of looks, tone and playability. B&G's wonderful-sounding unpotted pickups might not be our first choice for gainier applications with multiple overdrive pedals, but the Little Sister is a reminder that plugging a great electric guitar directly into a valve amplifier can sound simply magical. Neither a relic nor a retro curio, it feels like an old guitar, albeit a factory-fresh one, that will only get better as the years roll by. A guitar for life and no mistake...

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 HIGHLY COMMENDED

Patrick James Eggle Macon Carved Top

- **PRICE** £3,595
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 02
- **CONTACT** World Guitars 01453 824306 www.worldguitars.co.uk www.eggle.co.uk

2015 saw the welcome return to electric guitar manufacture of one of the UK's finest luthiers, and what a return; the double-cutaway, chambered, set-neck Macon Carved Top is light and highly resonant, beautifully built and has an array of sounds straight out of the top drawer. And in the 'neck of the year' stakes, the Macon's sumptuous Fat C profile in hand-burnished, low-gloss nitrocellulose finishes some distance ahead of the chasing pack.

Find more issues at
magazinesdownload.com

BEST ELECTRIC GUITAR

UNDER £1,000

Less than a grand to spend on your latest six-string squeeze? 2015's star performers proved to be rather more niche than we might have expected, but there's never been a better time to add 12-string sparkle or inspiring hollowbody tones to your arsenal...

Guitar GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 WINNER

Gretsch G9555 New Yorker Archtop with Pickup

- **PRICE** £539
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 12
- **CONTACT** Fender UK & ROI 01342 331700 **www.gretschguitars.com**

Guitar of what year, exactly? 1949? No, we haven't lost our minds. More and more venues are having to keep a lid on live music volume levels, onstage monitoring is getting increasingly sophisticated and small valve amps are commonplace, all of which means that a hollowbody electric guitar is a more viable stage instrument than it has been for decades. For just £539, with its deep V-neck and floating pickup, the Gretsch New Yorker has bags of old-time cool, but the sonics go way beyond retro. Big bass tones and cutting highs are equally effective for latter-day Radiohead as they are for swampy slide or early rock 'n' roll, and while volume and overdrive do bring willing feedback, learning to control and master this allows you to introduce swelling EBow-style lines over, say, a bed of clean fingerpicking you've laid down with a looper; sometimes the limitations of a simple instrument are more liberating than an array of switching options. That's certainly the case here...

Guitar WIN THIS GUITAR! Turn to p9

GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015

Guitar GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 HIGHLY COMMENDED

Epiphone Lee Malia Les Paul Custom

- **PRICE** £599
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 04
- **CONTACT** Gibson **www.epiphone.com**

Often, signature guitars can be tuned so finely to the needs of the artist whose name is emblazoned on the headstock that they appeal only to die-hard fans and tribute band members. That's not the case here; despite Malia's hard-riffing day job in Sheffield rockers Bring Me The Horizon, his 70s-influenced signature Les Paul wouldn't look out of place in a jazz combo or at a blues jam. While it can certainly handle the rough stuff with aplomb, the P-94 neck pickup widens the guitar's sonic horizons considerably...

Guitar GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 HIGHLY COMMENDED

Danelectro DC-59 12-string

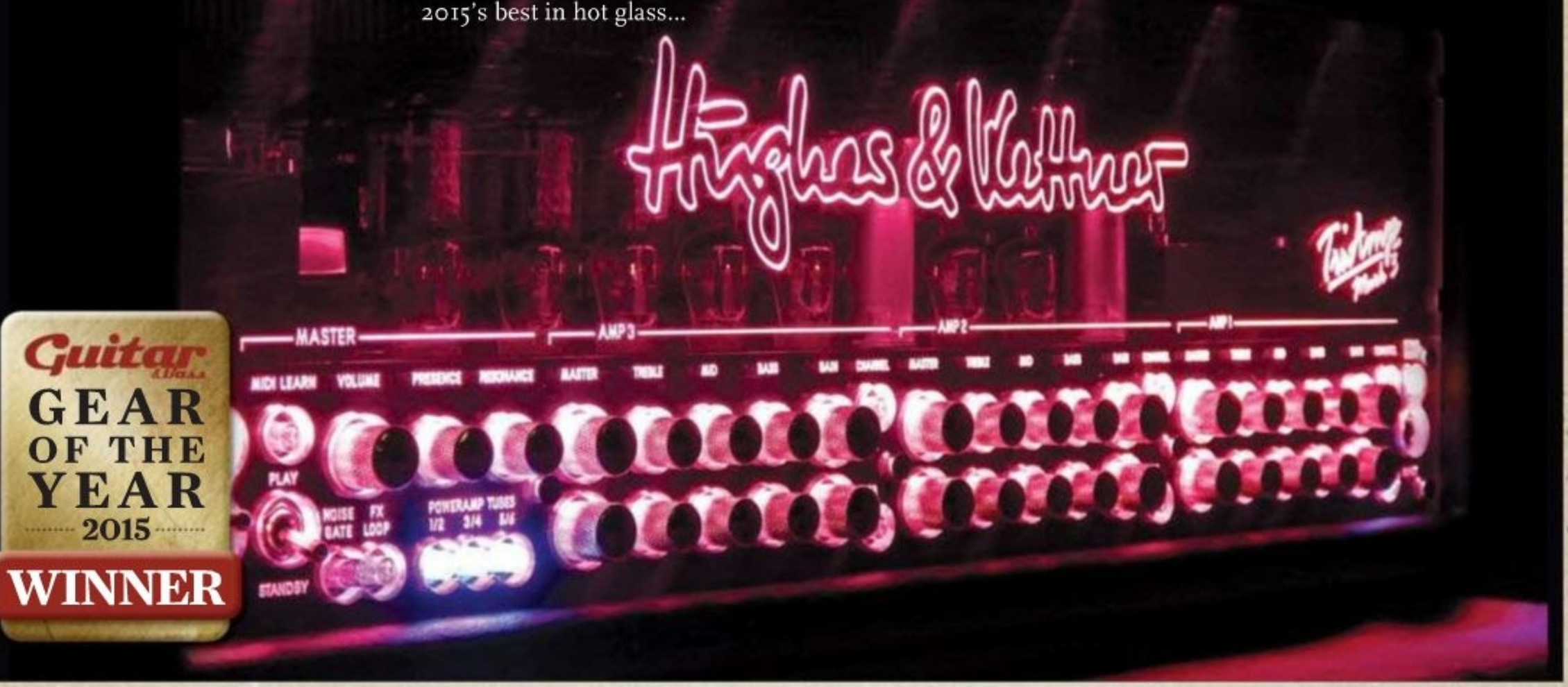
- **PRICE** £499
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 12
- **CONTACT** John Hornby Skewes 01132 865 381 **www.jhs.co.uk**

Few players would call on an electric 12-string for more than a handful of songs in a set, so it's understandable if the idea of shelling out big bucks for a guitar that delivers those janglesome textures seems like a luxury purchase too far. Happily, the DC-59 ticks the requisite aesthetic and sonic boxes for a shade less than 500 notes. If you're in a sixties coverband, it's a nigh-on essential purchase and even if you're not but have always fancied adding some authentic 12-string chime to your armoury, look no further...

BEST AMPLIFIERS

OVER £1,000

There can be little doubt that we're in the midst of a golden age of guitar amplification design. Barely a week goes by without another beautiful – and often wallet-busting – high-end valve amplifier being paraded in front of us. Here's 2015's best in hot glass...



Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 WINNER

Hughes & Kettner Triamp MkIII

- **PRICE** £2,799
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 11
- **CONTACT** JHS 0113 286 5381 www.jhs.co.uk

Back in the summer, we ran the world-exclusive first review of the new Triamp, a 150-watt, six-channel head that Hughes & Kettner claims "might just be the most intelligent, versatile tube amplifier the world has ever seen." With a complement of 15 valves and a vast array of sounds on offer, using the Triamp MkIII is more like spending time with an extensive collection of amplifiers: from tweedy and Vox-like clean voices to absolute filth and grind, it's all here, with a range of British and American flavours housed in a finely-tuned German chassis loaded with more knobs than a UKIP conference.

There are, of course, many guitar players who don't require anything more from their guitar amplifier than one great tone to use as a foundation for their pedals. However, those of you who need maximum versatility, MIDI compatibility and power to spare in any live or studio scenario would be advised to give the new Triamp a spin. You can even change the colour of the Triamp's illuminated fascia via stealth MIDI functionality, so you're not limited to just the traditional electric blue H&K light show.

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 HIGHLY COMMENDED

Swart Space Tone 45

- **PRICE** £1,999
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 10
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 www.coda-music.com

"One of the finest amps I've played," said Huw Price of the Space Tone 45 head in our review back in July. From the man who owns a monstrous-sounding original '51 Tweed Deluxe and has cranked, dismantled and rebuilt more great valve amps than most of us have had hot breakfasts, this is praise indeed.

Sure, it's not cheap, but Michael Swart's amplifiers are so boutique that it hurts, with premier league styling and addictive touch-sensitivity. A tweaker's delight, the Space Tone 45 allows for easy biasing and valve swaps, but once you've heard the seductive throb of the tremolo circuit, we suspect you won't want to change a thing...

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 HIGHLY COMMENDED

Carr Skylark

- **PRICE** £1,999
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 08
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350 815 www.coda-music.com

The dual-6V6 Fender Harvard amplifier of the 1950s provided the inspiration for the Carr Skylark. You might think it's less familiar than the Champ and 5E3 Deluxe that flanked it in Fender's late-50s catalogue, but you will doubtless have heard Steve Cropper playing one on countless classic Stax recordings.

Evocative styling, a luscious spring reverb, a mightily clever power attenuator and the ability to swerve effortlessly from righteous tweediness to chiming sparkle arguably make the Skylark not only Carr's best amplifier yet but one of the finest low-powered combos on the planet. The perfect home, studio and small gig amplifier for fans of classic American tone.

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BEST AMPLIFIERS

UNDER £1,000

Though it's easy to be seduced by the sumptuous tone machines on the opposite page, the fact is, you don't have to spend a fortune to sound very good indeed, especially with judicious use of stompboxes. And it's no surprise that the popularity explosion in the effects industry has created a demand for amplifiers that play nicely with your pedalboard; you'll find two designed along those lines here, along with a great little amp for home noodling...

GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 HIGHLY COMMENDED

Blackstar ID:Core BEAM

- **PRICE** £239
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 10
- **CONTACT** Blackstar Amplification 01604 817817 **www.blackstaramps.com**

Lifestyle amps, desktop amps, living room amps – call them what you will, they've made the humble transistor practice amps of yesteryear look positively prehistoric. Blackstar's BEAM joined the fray this year and set a new standard with Super Wide Stereo sound, wireless streaming via Bluetooth and a range of guitar voices and effects. "A great idea well executed that should be standard issue for all young guitarists," we said, but it wouldn't make a bad gift for a guitarist of any age...

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 WINNER

Fender Hot Rod DeVille ML 212

- **PRICE** £849
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 12
- **CONTACT** Fender UK & ROI 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

Michael Landau has worked as a session guitarist with artists as diverse as Michael Jackson and Miles Davis and he certainly knows a thing or two about getting a great guitar sound. Landau's collaboration with Fender on the Hot Rod DeVille ML 212 came about when the sessioneer was playing rented backline roulette on tour. One evening, he ended up with a Fender Hot Rod DeVille. Plugging his pedalboard into the clean channel, Landau thought it sounded great and handled pedals as well as any amp he'd ever used.

The Fender Custom Shop had already produced a signature Strat for Landau, so a signature amp seemed logical. The result is a one-channel Hot Rod DeVille with two footswitchable volume controls and a boost. Majestic, clear guitar tones with ample headroom and luscious reverb are available in abundance – this is an amplifier for the stage and no mistake, and street prices are low enough to allow you to use the change from a grand to buy a couple of nice pedals. After all, you wouldn't want that headroom to go to waste...

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 HIGHLY COMMENDED

Victory V40 The Duchess

- **PRICE** £829
- **FIRST FEATURED** Vol 26 No 12
- **CONTACT** Andertons 01483 456777 **www.victoryamps.com**

Back in September, we featured The Duchess in our round-up of six of the best pedal-platform amps and with good reason. The brainchild of amp guru Martin Kidd, the single-channel V40 offers plenty of headroom and a front end that's designed to work in conjunction with high-output overdrive, distortion and boost pedals in order to create an impressively wide variety of overdrive textures, compression and sustain characteristics.

Find more issues at magazinesdownload.com

BEST ACOUSTIC GUITAR

If all-mahogany builds were the prevailing fashion in the acoustic guitar industry in 2014, this year it's been torrefaction, as more and more manufacturers seek to emulate the sonic properties of old wood with thermal processes. Expect the great bake-off to continue into 2016...

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 WINNER

Taylor 614ce

- **PRICE** £2,922
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 11
- **CONTACT** Taylor Guitars +31 (0) 20 667 6033 **www.taylorguitars.com**

Maple has perhaps one of the most undeserved reps of all tonewoods. Clear, hard, bright, transparent - those are still the first words that come to mind, despite all we know about the variations you can find in vintage Gibsons and Guilds, not to mention archtops.

But maple is stable, fairly easy to work, has some beautiful figuring and is - very importantly - sustainable; 2015 saw Taylor, under the watchful eye of master luthier Andy Powers, aiming to annihilate that 'clear, hard, bright' notoriety once and for all with the 600 Series. Trust us, they went about the task with quite some vim.

In combination with a torrefied Sitka spruce top, redesigned bracing and a host of other changes masterminded by Powers, here, big leaf maple contributes to a voice that challenges preconceptions and does everything well, from contemporary fingerstyle to neo-country flatpicking and strummed chords. In addition, the onboard electronics are quack-free, with no undue harshness. If the 2015 614ce is a harbinger of the future of acoustic guitar manufacture, then the future's looking - and sounding - pretty good.

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 HIGHLY COMMENDED

Martin 000-18E Retro

- **PRICE** £2,149
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 04
- **CONTACT** Westside Distribution 0141 248 4812 **www.martinguitar.com**

The perfect blend of vintage and modern? With old-school looks, features and acoustic tone combined with a pickup system that sounds outstanding, the 000-18E Retro isn't cheap, but it's good enough acoustically to be your main home and studio guitar, and good enough plugged in to be your main gigging guitar - so that's two for the price of one.

It's difficult for heritage manufacturers to adopt modern technology without compromising the nature of their iconic guitars, but Martin has got it bang-on with the 000-18E Retro.

Guitar & Bass GEAR OF THE YEAR 2015 HIGHLY COMMENDED

Tanglewood TW130SMCE

- **PRICE** £369
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 07
- **CONTACT** Tanglewood 0113 2872991 **www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk**

Eminently affordable, this slotted-headstock, all-mahogany orchestra-size acoustic with a solid top and sides and a cutaway has an updated depression-era aesthetic and a voice to match that lends itself to rootsy blues, country picking and bottleneck styles. Peering inside the TW130SMCE reveals that it's neatly constructed, too. With such an engaging and enjoyable acoustic tone and a usable B-Band Crescent pickup system with soundhole control, there's a great deal to like here, not least the very affordable price.

FRANK TURNER

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BEST BASS GUITAR

Has the guitar industry's fixation with all things retro spread into bass territory? Though bass players tend to be more comfortable in an embrace with modernity than guitarists, some of the best basses we've encountered this year have blended old-school looks with sensible nods to the needs of contemporary players...

Sandberg California II TM5

- **PRICE** £1,884
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 02
- **CONTACT** Synergy Distribution 0121 270 6485 **www.synergydistribution.co.uk**

The stand-out feature of our bass of the year may well be its aged finish, but that's far from the only reason that the Sandberg California II TM5 sits proudly at the top of our chart of low-enders for 2015. This mark-two version sports a remodelled ash body, with the original's J-Bass-inspired outline replaced by an intelligent and classy variation that essentially downsizes the lower half of the body.

The nicely-distressed cosmetics come courtesy of Sandberg's Hardcore Aged Reserve process which, as well as judicious use of files and sanders, involves baking the wood. This simulates the tonal character of an older instrument, matching the played-in appearance, which extends to the hardware, plastics and the pickups. It just looks... well, old, but also highly appealing. Whether you like the idea of artificially distressing an instrument or not, a great deal of skill has undoubtedly gone into the process here.

Happily, the TM5 is an ultra-comfortable player, too, thanks to the maple neck's shallow C contour, while Sandberg's own preamp is hitched to a pair of Delano pickups, which uncork an excellent roster of high-quality sounds. There's growling width and definition for rock and pop, earthy and acoustically nuanced old-school vibes and a fat, snappily-defined, modern funk tone if you should want it.

Even the slightly excessive high-mid zing that occasionally rears up doesn't detract from the overall quality, or from the sheer fun you'll derive from playing the TM5 for a long time to come.

Reverend Dub King

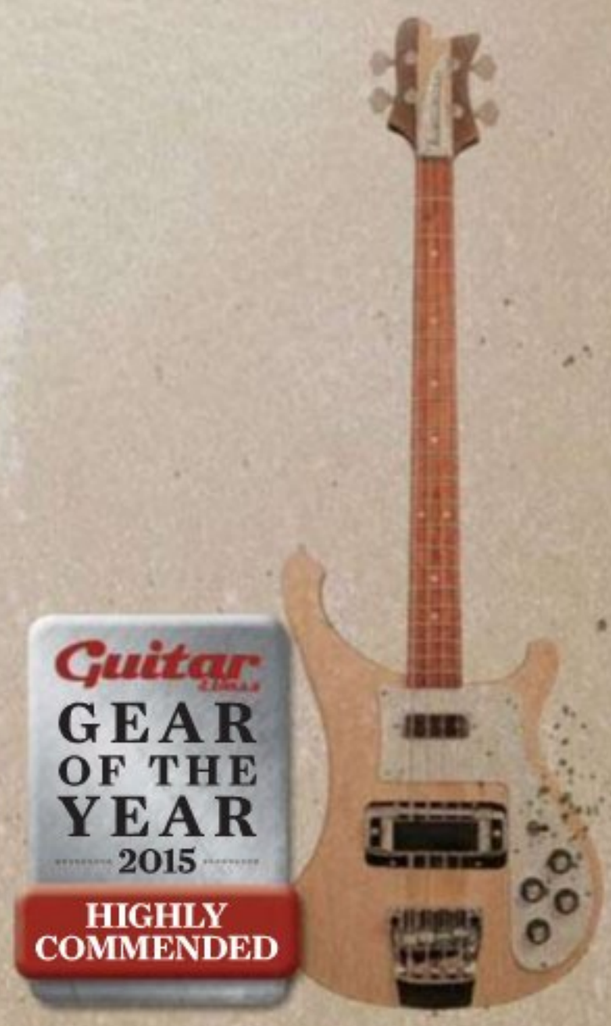
- **PRICE** £691
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 07
- **CONTACT** www.reverendguitars.com

Semi-hollow basses seem to have been enjoying something of a renaissance in recent times, and the Dub King brings a welcome slice of originality to this end of the market. Reverend's set-neck, short scale Dub King, in its handsome shade of Gretsch-like orange, features a pickup pan control, allowing you to obtain audible degrees of mix between each pickup. A handsome looker with plenty of air in its tones, the Dub King will make an ideal purchase for low-end players who like retro pop, old-school soul and blues.

Rickenbacker 4003S

- **PRICE** £1,950
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 11
- **CONTACT** Rosetti 01376 550 033 **www.rickenbacker.com**

The 4003 has been a staple of the Rickenbacker catalogue since 1981, but 2015 saw the company release the updated 4003S, eschewing binding for sleeker, 60s-style lines and a more comfortable ride. There's also a pull-up vintage setting for the bridge pickup tone control, which accesses the treble punch of the 4001 via a cunning capacitor in the bridge pickup circuit. That classic Ricky growl and solid sounds for groove playing are here in abundance, while the build is exemplary.



C9 ORGAN MACHINE

The latest organ machine springboards off the game changing B9 to mine another rich vein of classic gold and deliver 9 new, definitive sounds, featuring a collection of some of the coolest electric organ and vintage electronic keyboard sounds ever. Like the B9, it delivers precise control over percussive click, modulation, attack/sustain, drawbar setting and high frequency content. Transform your instrument or use together with the B9 for dual keyboard possibilities!

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TRANSPARENT OVERDRIVE

"Scuse me while I kiss the sky.

SUPER PULSAR

stereo tap tremolo

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BEST EFFECTS

Despite 2015 being hailed in these very pages as the year of the tiny pedalboard, plenty of bigger boxes have impressed us too, and it's no exaggeration to state that we could have easily devoted half of this issue of the magazine to a round-up of our favourite stompboxes of the year. Here are five of the toppermost...

J Rockett Audio Designs Archer

- **PRICE** £149
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 10
- **CONTACT** Zoom UK Distribution 08432 080 999 **www.rockettpedals.com**

JRAD was founded a decade ago by Colorado natives Chris Van Tassel and Jay Rockett with the needs of working guitarists in mind, not least high-calibre session pros such as Tim Pierce and Guthrie Trapp, for whom the pair developed signature overdrive pedals. No strangers to collaboration, they also helped Klon mastermind Bill Finnegan produce the first 1,500 KTR pedals. Though the relationship didn't last, the unique insights they gleaned allowed them to produce the Archer, effectively the affordable 'son of Centaur' that many wish Finnegan had made. The Archer isn't the first or the last klone, but it's certainly one of the best; there's perhaps a hair more bite from the real thing, and the Archer possesses a slightly grittier midrange, but it's very close indeed. For a tenth of the going rate of an original Klon, the Archer offers near-as-damn-it tones in a much more pedalboard-friendly enclosure. As a straight-up overdrive, it's not everyone's cup of leaves and hot water, but running the gain low and output high yields an organic, amp-like boost that you won't want to switch off.

Boss RV-6 Reverb

- **PRICE** £119
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 03
- **CONTACT** Roland UK 01792 702701 **www.roland.co.uk**

Stompbox reverbs have come a long way since Boss launched the RV-2 back in 1987, and the company's latest digital reverb pedal is also its greatest to date. There are eight reverb modes, from a convincing classic spring emulation to shimmer 'verb and +delay, which is an expansive blend of hall reverb and digital delay. Dynamic reverb is a very cool addition - hit the strings hard and it will retreat into the background, then swell again when there's space to be filled. We like almost everything about this inspiring pedal; awesome stuff.

ThorpyFX Gunshot

- **PRICE** £185
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 11
- **CONTACT** ThorpyFX **www.thorpyfx.com**

If British Army Major Adrian Thorpe had targeted 2015 for world domination, he must be very pleased with his work over the last year indeed. The Gunshot overdrive started the ball rolling in late spring, with industry movers and shakers and tonehounds in the know quickly cottoning on to its hugely satisfying medium-to-high-gain tones and exceptional build quality. The Muffroom Cloud followed, and Thorpy has a couple more overdrives in the works, which will be featured in *G&B* in the coming months. Excellent work Major Thorpe, we salute you sir!

Electro-Harmonix Super Pulsar

- **PRICE** £219
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 27 No 02
- **CONTACT** Electro-Harmonix **www.ehx.com**

Tremolo is one of the staple electric guitar effects, but the Super Pulsar pushes it to infinity and beyond in a way that's guaranteed to appeal to noisenik experimentalists everywhere. Whatever kind of tremolo sound you want, the Super Pulsar has it covered; it might even change the way you think about the effect, too. Every so often, a guitar effects processor comes along with the creative potential to become not only your signature sound but central to the identity of your band as a whole; this is one such unit. Very impressive indeed.

Orange Bax Bangeetar

- **PRICE** £279
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 12
- **CONTACT** Orange Amps 0208 905 2828 **www.orangeamps.com**

Much more than simply a stack-in-a-box or an overdrive pedal with additional knobs, Orange's first pedal since 1972 is a powerful and incredibly versatile tone-shaping tool that's great for recording and distressing vocals, bass and drums as well as scultpting guitar sounds. Limited to only 2,500 units, the Bax Bangeetar - named after the onboard Baxandall-style EQ - comes as close as you can possibly get to capturing the brain of Orange technical director Adrian Emsley in the confines a stompbox. Expect to see more Orange pedals in 2016.

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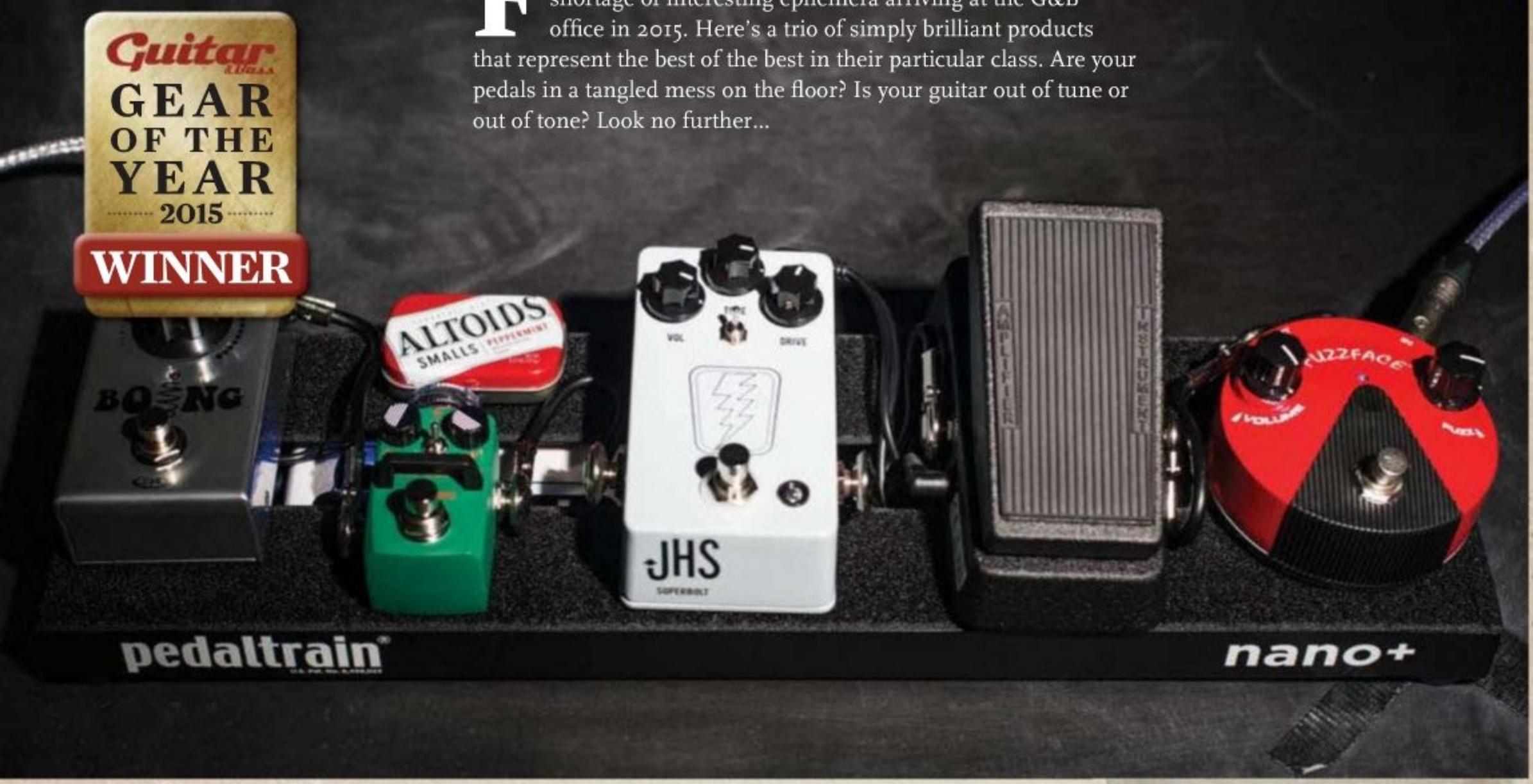
BEST ACCESSORIES

From tiny tuners to retrofit pickups, there has been no shortage of interesting ephemera arriving at the G&B office in 2015. Here's a trio of simply brilliant products that represent the best of the best in their particular class. Are your pedals in a tangled mess on the floor? Is your guitar out of tune or out of tone? Look no further...



Pedaltrain Nano+

- **PRICE** £42
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 12
- **CONTACT** Westside Distribution 0141 248 4812 **www.pedaltrain.com**

Since the company began as a one-man start-up in 1999, Pedaltrain has become so ubiquitous within the pedalboard market that some stompbox manufacturers now factor the dimensions of Pedaltrain boards into their plans when they're designing new products. As successful as Pedaltrain is, though, it refuses to rest on its laurels. Back in January 2015, the NAMM Show saw the company discontinue its entire range and launch 11 new models, from the enormous 42×14.5-inch Terra right down to the smallest board in its range, the Pedaltrain Nano+. Reviewed in the September issue as part of our mini-pedalboard special, the Nano+ carries the dizzying accolade of being the only product to score a perfect 10/10 in *G&B* in 2015. The original Pedaltrain Nano was very successful, but the Nano+ adds four inches of extra board space and comes housed in a considerably more robust gigbag with chunky metal zippers, tough padding and reinforced stress points. There's also a new, narrower rail spacing designed to provide greater stability and adhesion for smaller pedals. Other than wishing the gigbag had an external pocket for cable storage, at this price the Nano+ is just about the perfect small pedalboard.

TC Electronic PolyTune Clip

- **PRICE** £35
- **FIRST FEATURED** Vol 27 No 04
- **CONTACT** www.tcelectronic.com

Included in our round-up of Christmas stocking-fillers that begins on page 91, TC's take on the popular clip-on tuner format makes the competition look rather dated to say the least. Derived from the Danish company's PolyTune and PolyTune Mini pedal tuners, that have become the must-have stompbox tuners of recent times, the Clip is a killer little gadget that's incredibly handy to have around, whether you are a touring guitar tech or a bedroom strummer. Three fast and accurate modes of operation – polyphonic, chromatic and strobe – combine with a display that flips the viewing angle to respond to your needs. A modern design triumph and a must-have guitar gadget.

House Of Tone House Special S Type 1960 pickups

- **PRICE** £155
- **FIRST REVIEWED** Vol 26 No 12
- **CONTACT** House Of Tone Pickups 07791 691251 **www.houseoftonepickups.com**

House Of Tone's Matthew Bascetta equates the voicing of pickups to carving the braces of an acoustic guitar. Building acoustic instruments taught Bascetta to listen and evaluate tone at a fine level, and these skills were employed in extremis when developing the House Of Tone range with partners Nick Leech and Bob Grocott. This set was conceived as an 'idealised' 1960 Strat tone, based on readings taken from several genuine examples. We're pleased to say they nailed it; in an A/B with a genuine vintage set we honestly couldn't say the original pickups sounded better.

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CHRIS VINNICOMBE

J Rockett Audio Designs Archer

If I were to undergo a polygraph test, it would probably reveal that the piece of gear I enjoyed using the most in 2015 was the '54 Les Paul that Huw subjected to a forensic examination in the inaugural Vintage Bench Test in the November issue. However, that particular guitar is, erm, 61 years old, so it probably doesn't qualify for inclusion in Gear Of The Year. Not the 2015 edition, anyway.

Forced to rein in my natural inclination towards all things retrograde, my pick of the year simply has to be the Archer. As discussed previously, this Centaur sound-alike costs a tenth of the current going rate for the real thing and regardless of the hype, it's just a really great-sounding pedal. That said, 2016 will see the Archer face stiff competition, not least from J Rockett's own Archer IKON Gold and Wampler's diminutive Tumnus pedal. ThorpyFX has something pretty special in the works, too...

WRITERS PICKS

Which products lit the fire for our expert reviewers in 2015?

HUW PRICE

B&G Little Sister

I'm sure we've all experienced a pang of longing when first seeing a new guitar that looks as if it will be the stuff of dreams. You've probably looked for online reviews, trawled YouTube for demos and waited what seems like an eternity for the chance to try one. Unfortunately, it's rare for the actuality to live up to the fantasy.

It took ages to get hold of a B&G Little Sister, but this was one of those occasions when a much-anticipated guitar turned out to be everything we had hoped for. In a sense, it's a fantasy instrument, combining the looks and feel of a Delta blues acoustic with the styling and playability of a post-war electric.

The Little Sister may be a brand new guitar, but many of the woods B&G uses are reclaimed and it does have the feel and tone of a historic instrument. Much of B&G's hardware is made in house, including the stellar P-90-style pickups. It can be sweet, dynamic, delicate, raucous and even aggressive. Pair this one up with a vintage-toned low-power valve amp and rediscover the timeless beauty of pure electric guitar tone.

RICHARD PURVIS

Boss RV-6 Reverb

I've never been truly convinced about the value of reverb pedals – so what were the chances of this one winning me over? Slim, until I switched it on. One of the great advantages of modern digital processing is that you can include several different sounds in one compact unit without any sonic compromise – a fact that has allowed rival makers to push things forward since the launch of the RV-5 no less than 13 years ago – but the versatility of the new RV-6 proves that Boss is in no danger of being left behind.

All eight modes – from classic spring and hall 'verbs to modulated sounds and one with delay thrown in – can be used in mono or cavernous stereo. The emulations offer flawless (and virtually noiseless) recreations of the real thing, while the shoegazey washes available in the modulated modes are so inspiring you will forget to go to bed. For three days.

And so, against the odds, this grey brick became my new favourite pedal. Prepare to be converted.

GARY WALKER

Electro-Harmonix Super Pulsar Stereo Tap Tremolo

The Super Pulsar is one of those pedals that comes along once in a while and transcends the dimensions of its humble stompbox enclosure, becoming a musical instrument in its own right. EHX has crammed an incredible amount of functionality into a pedal that can be bought for not much more than £150. The Pulsar covers amp-style tremolo, stereo panning, rhythmic patterns, reverse effects, ring-mod sounds and loads more. With wave, shape, depth, rate and xRate controls, tap divide, stereo ins and outs and eight preset slots, the scope for invention is near-infinite. The miniature envelope depth and rate knobs take things further still, producing trem sounds that speed up or slow down in relation to your playing dynamics; strike a chord and watch in wonder as the tremolo slows while the sound dies away. Enormous fun. The Pulsar may be the best tremolo pedal we've seen.

READER BOARDS

NATHAN ABRAHAM's harmony-rich power-pop band, Burning Ferns, require a range of classic tones, which this board provides...

KIT LIST

Nathan Abraham

- **PEDALS (IN ORDER)** Boss TU-3 Tuner; Keeley Compressor (two-knob version); Fulltone Clyde Deluxe Wah; Zvex Fuzz Factory; Fulltone OCD; Keeley-modded Boss TR-2 Tremolo; Eventide H9; Way Huge Supa-Puss Analog Delay
- **PATCH CABLES** George L's solderless
- **POWER SUPPLY** T-Rex Fuel Tank Classic
- **BOARD TYPE** Pedaltrain Pro with matching flightcase
- **HEAR IT HERE** www.countrymile.org

What inspired this setup?

"I wanted a 'meat-and-potatoes' set-up to cover all eventualities, but using the very best varieties of meat and potatoes. Apart from the H9, the effect types are all pretty standard, in an order that the old 1980s Boss catalogues used to recommend. My band plays 60s and 70s-influenced guitar pop (think Badfinger, The Byrds and Teenage Fanclub), so there were a few basic necessities to start with – compression, trem and analogue echo being the obvious choices."

Tell us a little about the journey...

"I bought most of these pedals on the basis of guitar mag reviews, YouTube clips and gut feeling rather than trying them out in shops, and I've got not regrets. There are myriad tonal possibilities, but I try to use the effects sparingly. The range of drive tones provided by my Boogie Mark V means that there's not a huge call for extra gain – I actually use the OCD for generating feedback on the intro to one live tune, and that's it. The tremolo, I used to leave on all the time, a la Bonamassa, but now it's only used occasionally. Meanwhile, the H9 has the best Leslie simulation I've ever heard, but you have to be careful not to turn it into novelty."

Is there another pedal that you are looking to add?

"With the H9 in amongst everything else, I think my board's got everything covered. I'm interested in hearing an Xotic EP Booster, largely because no-one's yet been able to explain to me exactly what it does! I think the five-band EQ on my Boogie might already be doing a similar job. I don't know what it is, but I hate my tone when it's not there."

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?

"My main squeeze is an Epiphone Elitist Casino with retro-fitted Bigbsy B7. I back off the bridge P-90 to about 7, and plug it into the edge-of-dirty channel on my Mesa/Boogie Mark V. That tone's all I really need – the pedalboard's just sprinkling a bit of sugar on top. I love the Casino because it's a common denominator amongst all the British Invasion bands. Not just The Beatles, but also the Stones and The Kinks and loads more. Put the Supa-Puss into slapback mode and it can sound like Scotty Moore's ES-295 with ease. Put in a little compression and light drive and you've got *Rubber Soul*. I know a Boogie's not the most obvious choice for a guitar pop band, but its in-between tones are amazing. I wanted one since seeing those cool Vernon Reid, Allan Holdsworth and Michael Anthony magazine ads in the 80s.

What lessons have you learned along the way?

"Get a car with a big boot. My bandmates refer to my pedalboard flightcase as 'the continent of Africa'. In retaliation, I play lots of daft Eventide H9-generated synth and arpeggiator noises in-between songs. They really hate that."

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, either post a picture on our Facebook page via this link **http://bit.ly/showusyourpedalboard** or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Joel Hoekstra

The Whitesnake and former Night Ranger and Foreigner guitarist picks his favourite albums

New York's Joel Hoekstra has a vast guitar-playing CV. Aside from his solo project and currently handling axe duties in Whitesnake, he's enjoyed spells in Night Ranger, Trans Siberian Orchestra, Foreigner and Big Brother And The Holding Company, completed a six-year run in the hit Broadway show *Rock Of Ages* and appeared on a series of American TV shows. His latest, self-produced, solo release is his third, and features contributions from an experienced cast of rock royalty, including Jeff Scott Soto, Russell Allen, Tony Franklin, Vinny Appice and Derek Sherinian. *Joel Hoekstra 13's new album Dying To Live is out now on Frontiers Music SRL. He tours the UK with Whitesnake in December. For further information and ticket details, see his official website: www.joelhoekstra.com*

Journey
GREATEST HITS

"It's a great collection, and some of the best singing and melodic guitar playing ever. It's been a big influence, and Steve Perry's Sam Cooke-style back phrasing is something you don't hear much. There's such amazing musicianship in that band, Neil Schon always picks the best players to put around himself. *Who's Crying Now* summarises the whole thing."

Trevor Rabin
CAN'T LOOK AWAY

"Trevor Rabin's one of my favourite vocalists. I love the sound of his voice and his writing style. It caters to musicians, but it's still hooky. He has the perfect blend of playing for musicians, but also the fans, and keeping it catchy. I'm a huge fan of his work with Yes, and I love how he works with guitar sounds. He's not afraid to get adventurous."

AC/DC
BACK IN BLACK

"Hard-rock perfection! Angus Young is the best showman to set foot on a stage, and the reason I started guitar. Seeing him when I was 11 lit a fire under me and made me ask for my first guitar. The musicianship in AC/DC is better than a lot of people think, too, just in terms of the groove. Drummers should take note of Phil Rudd's drumming."

The Sundays
READING, WRITING AND ARITHMETIC

"This was their first album, and I love it. The following albums were a little more produced, but there's something amazing about that singer. I never say this about anyone, but man she sounds sexy! David Gavurin's playing is unique. All his parts come from a cool place, are very textural and layered, and he does some really unique work. "

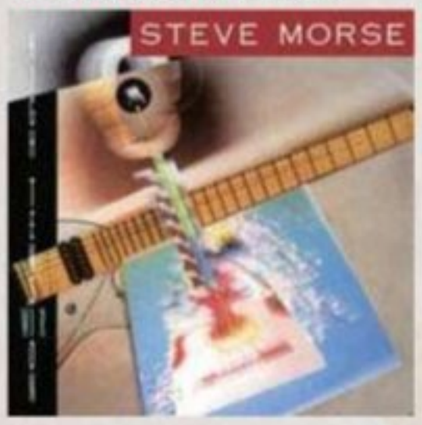
Whitesnake
WHITESNAKE

"This is a no-brainer. I wore it out. There's not a dud song, every one is fantastic, with amazing vocals by David Coverdale and great musicianship. John Sykes' guitar sound is something else. I became familiar with them during *Slide It In*, in seventh grade. It's been a fantastic experience to play with them so far. David is rock royalty and he's a gem of a person."

Steve Vai
PASSION AND WARFARE

"That record stands out because he was really coming from a standpoint of making all those licks about something else and visualising something else. He did some realy nice melodic playing on that album. I was probably 17 when it came out and really wanting to work on lots of chops and Steve Vai was a really great influence in that department."

Steve Morse
HIGH TENSION WIRES



"Steve's playing on this album is really unique. It's more about the arrangment than the chops. There's a lot of direct-sounding acoustic stuff and clean stuff. Steve Morse is a genius player, no question, and as the years have passed I've become friends with him. I'm in a group chat with him, Jeff Watson, Bumblefoot and a bunch of us."

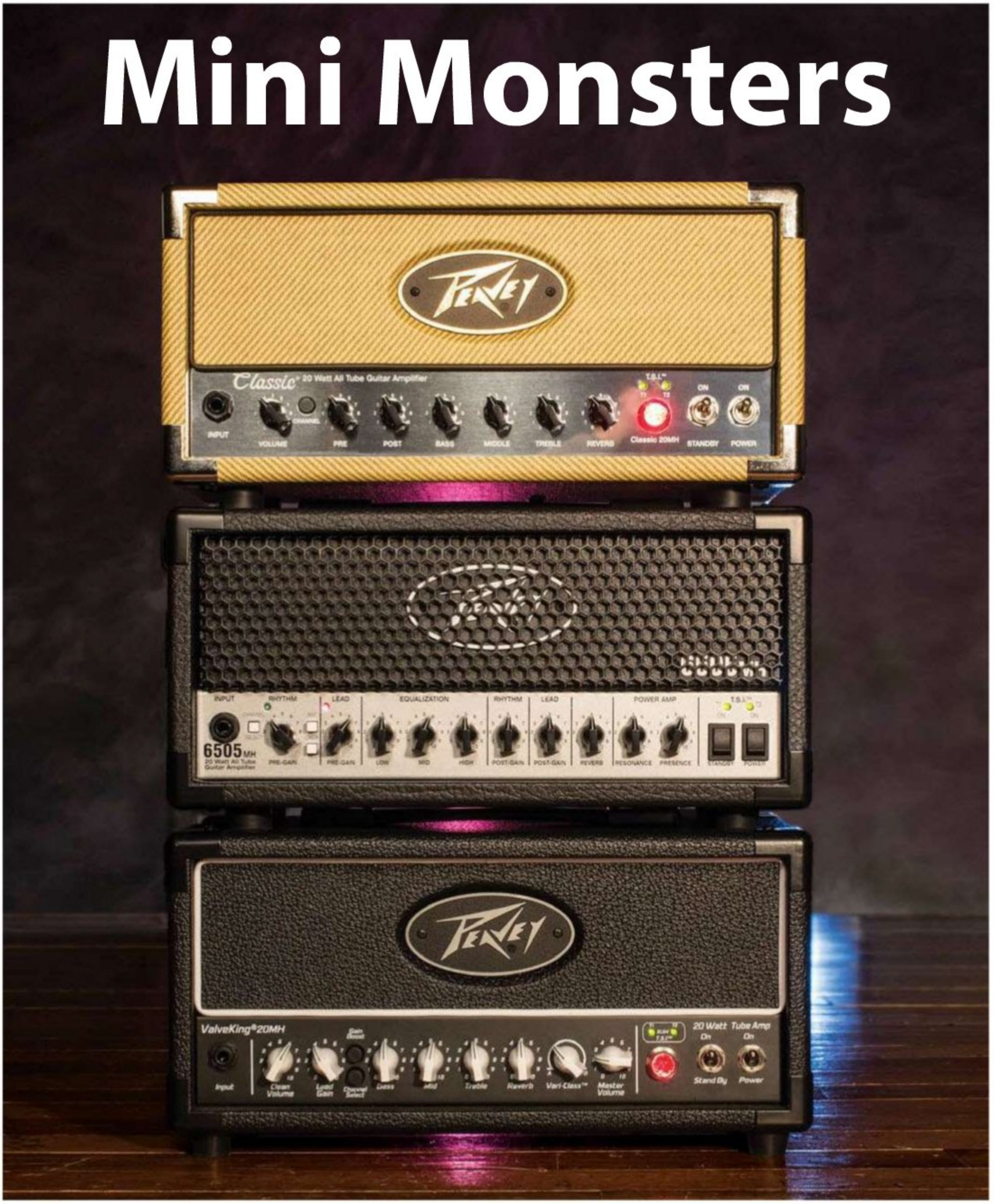
Pink Floyd
THE WALL

"Some of the best classic-rock songwriting ever, because it came from the heart yet was hooky. Everything is digestible, and in terms of psychedelic rock it's perfection. David Gilmour is an amazing player. He's very melodic and hooky and it's some of the best Strat playing ever. It's a great recording too. You feel like you're in the room with it."

Rush
MOVING PICTURES

"Rush were a big influence on me. There's something about the drum sound on that album and Alex Lifeson did his best work on this, too. It's a great album where they'd got over all the long-winded concept writing and put things in a more digestible form, which is a theme in my nine albums. I like when there's great musicianship but it's not self-indulgent."

Mini Monsters



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THE Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

"When I was writing this album I didn't know if I would walk again. That was terrifying"

After a turbulent period that saw Richard Hawley questioning whether he'd play live again, one of the UK's finest songwriters and owner of a guitar collection to make grown men weep with envy returns triumphant with new album *Hollow Meadows*...

Story **Gary Walker** | Live photography **Eleanor Jane**

Richard Hawley is in a good place again. "I'm in a world where I'm playing guitar with my mates and having the time of my life on tour," he tells *Guitar & Bass*, safely ensconced in a Glasgow hotel room preparing for a sold-out show at the city's Barrowlands venue and reflecting on a year in which he released his eighth album, the serene and reflective *Hollow Meadows*.

The path hasn't always been so smooth in recent years for the confirmed Gretsch fanatic and owner of one of popular music's most desirable vintage guitar collections. Such feelings of contentment and inner peace are a welcome tonic after a recent history that's seen one of Sheffield's most famous sons endure a leg break, fight off a subsequent addiction to the prescription drug Tramadol and then suffer a back injury that led doctors to advise Hawley he might never walk again.

The accident in 2013, in which he sustained a slipped disc, resulted in Hawley being forced to spend five months in bed, trapped in his own mind. It left the 48-year-old questioning his existence.

That feeling of uncertainty is documented on one of *Hollow Meadows*' stand-out tracks. On the stirring *Which Way*, with its wailing Bigsby vibrato-lashed soloing, a vulnerable-sounding Hawley backed by gospel harmonies pleads for clarity as he considers his mortality: "Give me some directions please/solid ground is all I need/won't you tell me, which way do I go?"

Salvation came, fittingly for a man inexorably linked to his home city, from the hands of the Sheffield Wednesday Football Club physio Paul Smith, and Hawley is grateful to be back in a position of contentment that he'd begun to doubt he'd ever find again. >

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"If I was writing the album this year, it would have been a better place, but when I was writing that album I didn't know if I would walk again, and that was fucking terrifying – doing my back in, and they told me that I'd probably not walk again," Hawley recalls in his treacly nicotine-coated tones.

"That was pretty scary, then laying on your back for five months... the thing that got me through in the end was Paul Smith, who told me 'I am going to make you better'. Having that absolute rock-solid assurance that you don't need surgery and you don't need all this stuff they're telling you that you need, that it's going to be alright, was good.

"I was in a position where I thought 'I don't know what the fuck is going to happen'. Like a lot of people, you get to a certain point in life where you think 'Is this it? Is it over?'. Tonight, we're playing at Glasgow Barrowlands, it's sold out and it's definitely not over. And I'm glad about that! [laughs]"

Hollow Meadows, released in September, found Hawley in contemplative, soulful mood – unsurprisingly given the period of enforced introspection that surrounded its conception.

Hawley at home with his Hofner Senator

Its wistful ruminations on age, mortality and relationships stripped-back arrangements and gentle acoustic playing stand in contrast to the rich wall of sound and driven, bit-between-the-teeth approach that characterised 2012's *Standing At The Sky's Edge*. We ask if those two releases are direct embodiments of the phases of life in which they were written.

"Every album is," Hawley acknowledges. "It's the different ages of man, I guess – or this particular man. I find it difficult to write songs in any other place than where I am mentally and in terms of life. I'm 48 years old, not 28 and I don't want to pretend that I am. So I guess a lot of people might listen to it and not get it because they're young. I'm not saying it's specifically an album that was made for older people, but it's definitely an album that's made at this time of life.

"There are no rules. I've not got a specific way of writing. With *Standing At The Sky's Edge* I knew I needed to do something with volume involved, and possibly distortion. I didn't realise that it was going to go as far as it did. I'm glad it did and in some ways I could have taken it further, but there's always another record somewhere down the line where I can experiment.

"I collect sound and experiment with sound. It's not necessarily X guitar or that bass. It's sonics I'm interested in, I'm not even interested in musicianship, particularly, as a definite thing – it's sound that interests me."

Top gear

The recording of *Hollow Meadows*, which was demoed in Hawley's shed studio that he calls 'Disgracelands', saw him indulging his long-held passion for collecting vintage gear, tracking through a trio of lust-worthy old amps and playing an array of gorgeous guitars including his '56 Gretsch 6120 and a pair of Eastwoods. One shopping trip to Lincolnshire with long-time friend and folk songwriter Martin Simpson – who contributed slide guitar and banjo parts to the album – proved particularly fruitful.

"I recorded most of the record in the shed, me and Shez [co-producer Shez Sheridan]," says Hawley. "I met a guy called Norman Mitchell, who runs Old Hat Guitars in Horncastle, and I bought an old Chet Atkins Gretsch amp off him. I'd already got one that I'd had for years, and I took it up to him on the recommendation of Martin Simpson. Martin came with me and bought an old Magnatone amp and I bought this old Chet Atkins 1963 amp – I use that a lot.

"I also bought a 1955 Gibson ES-295, which is in pristine condition. They're rarer than hens' teeth, and with it came a Gibson GA-19 amp that was sold on the same day with the guitar. I use that a load and I bought a Fender Blues Deluxe that was souped up by Norman for a harmonica. I plugged it in and just fell in love with it. I begged him to sell it to me,

Hawley at Bristol's Colston Hall on his recent UK tour

which he did bless him. It was those three amps that I used on the record.

"We used a couple of Eastwood guitars – an Eastwood 12-string and an Eastwood Baritone – a lot on the album. Because it was kind of done in the shed, I thought 'I'm probably going to replace all this'. Many years ago, I bought my daughter a no-name T-style with no brand on the headstock, and I used that loads and it sounded ace.

I used my '56 Gretsch 6120 a lot and various pedals that I can't remember exactly. On the fuzzier stuff, I used something I got into via [*Standing At The Sky's Edge* engineer] Alan Moulder on the last album, an Ibanez Standard Fuzz, 70s – awesome, an absolutely ridiculous thing. It's got these two faders on it and it's amazing. But a lot of it was quite a pure sound, straight into the amp, no pedals at all. With this record, I just wanted to simplify everything. It's why live we can play it as-is."

When we witness Hawley live, peforming to a sold-out Colston Hall in Bristol, he has the crowd in the palm of his heavily arthritic hands from the get-go. Encamped at the centre of a circle of amps and monitors, he gets through an enviable roll-call of guitars, producing a towering, fearsomely loud sound, rich in expertly marshalled feedback, lacerating fuzz and luscious tremolo.

"I've got various guitars that I use live. My long-suffering guitar tech, Gordon, I think he likes it really... I use loads – Gretsches, Rickenbackers, Gibsons... and my excuse is I can't stand to play a guitar that's out of tune and I don't have time to fuck about tuning up. The [Gretsch] 6196 CG stays in tune, you could hit it with a lump hamper and it wouldn't go out, but the '56 you play it one song and it's all out. Retuning a 12-string on stage when you're supposed to be playing a gig, I haven't got time to be dicking about like that.

"It's like the folk singer who was facing the firing squad and they said 'have you got any last requests?' and he said 'do you mind if I tune my 12-string?' I haven't got time. I want to be on the mic talking to people, then onto the next song. I haven't got time to mess about."

> "I bought a 1955 Gibson ES-295 in pristine condition. They're rarer than hens' teeth, and with it came a Gibson GA-19 amp"

Hawley's trademark tremolo sound is present and correct on *Hollow Meadows*, with the Dunlop TS-1 his go-to pedal during the album sessions. He has rock 'n' roll legend Duane Eddy, whose 2011 album *Road Trip* he produced, to thank for recommending it.

"There's a few I use, and I use them in tandem sometimes," says Hawley. "Roger Mayer sent us a Voodoo Vibe, me and Shez, and we used that on the album, but I haven't taken it out live. I use the Dunlop stereo tremolo. When I was working with Duane Eddy he got me into that, he uses it a lot and I've started using it, as I love the sound." >

RICHARD'S RIG

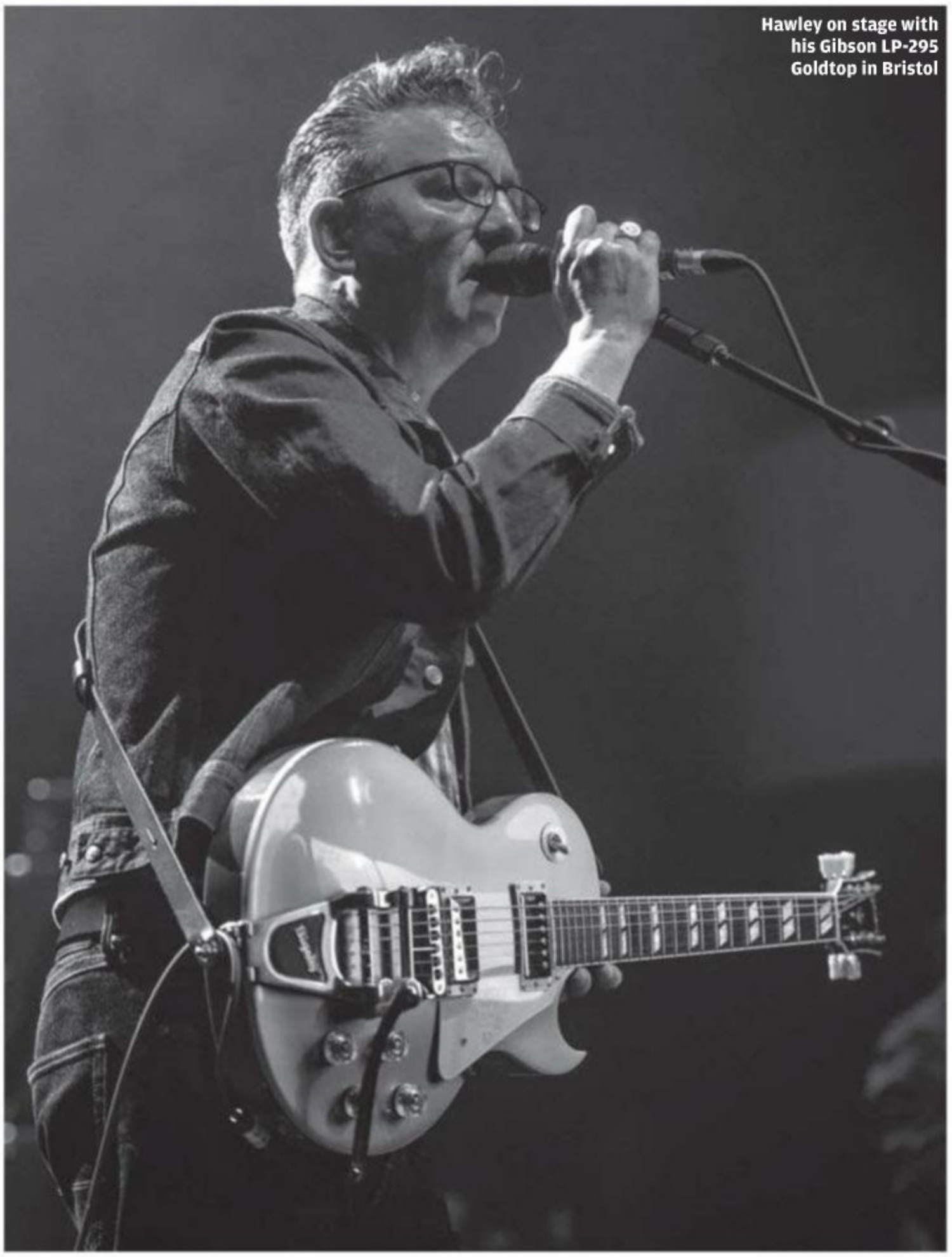
The vintage gear in Hawley's vast guitar and amp collection is spared from live action, but he employs an equally formidable setup on the road, made up of a quartet of Fender and Blackstar amps. Backed by Shez Sheridan's 12-string playing through a similarly sizable rig, it makes for a huge, pulverising sound – as witnessed on a recent short run of UK dates that saw Hawley in fine form, oblivious to his flirtation with paralysis a few years earlier.

"I don't take the vintage stuff out, it wouldn't be fair to it. I use two Fender [Hot Rod] Deluxes, a Fender Super-Sonic and a Blackstar 30-watt Artisan Series, all of them on. It's an immense sound," Hawley enthuses. "My old soundman, Mike, hated it. He was like, 'why are you doing this? It's too complicated', moaning all the time. He got used to it very quickly once he heard it a few times..."

Like many of his releases, *Hollow Meadows* was named after a place in Sheffield – originally called Auley Meadows, the Hawley family have roots there dating back as far as the 14th century. Always a vocal political commentator, when asked what the mood is like in his beloved city, where many people felt betrayed by the city's MP Nick Clegg's cosying up to the Tories in 2010, and whether the selection of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader has sparked a feeling of renewed optimism, Hawley is typically forthright.

"I'm not sure Corbyn isn't John The Baptist to a Jesus that's going to come," he says. "He's the most hopeful thing that's happened in politics for a long time and it's given people hope, but we had that feeling with Tony Blair, so I think there's a degree of cynicism. The unforgivable Blair, who took us to war and lied to us and all those awful things.

"It's not just Sheffield, it's the country as a whole. I despair of politics, I really do. I've got to the point where I think I can contribute more change in people's views of things with my guitar than my vote. That's a bit sad, as my history's well documented, where I'm from and everything. I do at least hope it stems the tide of the greed heads. What the Tories are doing, selling us off to the highest bidder, is despicable, and the stuff with the tax credits and all that, they're just despicable people. They're vandals, they're not politicians and I despise them all. They should be asset stripping a company rather than a country."



Hawley on stage with his Gibson LP-295 Goldtop in Bristol

Collaborative spirit

Eight solo albums, two Mercury Prize nominations, a spell playing in Pulp alongside Sheffield friend Jarvis Cocker, of whom Hawley says "We'll be brothers 'til the end" and numerous collaborations and production gigs have followed since his departure from indie band The Longpigs in 2000. Hawley remains keen to work with other artists.

"Call me old-fashioned, but it's likely to happen, isn't it?" he reflects. "I like doing it because it gets you out of yourself and makes you see your own thing in a different perspective. That's a continuation of stuff I've done since the dawn of me playing, when I did sessions or got asked to do stuff because I was creative – not because I could read the dots, because I can't read music. I guess the phone hasn't stopped ringing and now I've become successful in my own right, the focus is on what they call collaboration – before, it was session guitar. I don't know the difference to be honest."

As our conversation winds towards its end, we wonder what the Hawley of 15 years ago would have made of *Hollow Meadows*. He recalls the advice of his father, who spent the last of his redundancy money following his departure from one of Sheffield's steelworks in the early 80s buying a teenage Hawley his first Gretsch – a Country Gent for £295.

"I think I'd have been happy," he replies. "It was very frustrating for many years. I was alright playing guitar [in The Longpigs], I was quite happy with that, but I've always wrote songs and there was always this thing in the back of my mind – I'm going to have to do this one of these days, and it was my dad who said don't get to 60 and look back and go, 'shit, I didn't do it'. Whatever it is you want to do or be, it wasn't necessarily songs, don't save up for it, do it now because time is an arrow that runs away from you – and very quickly – whatever it is you want to do, get on with it now because you don't have the time to dick about."

> "Whatever you want to do, do it now because time is an arrow that runs away from you"

LISTEN UP

RICHARD HAWLEY
Hollow Meadows (2015)
Hawley's eighth album is a refined listen. Check out the affecting *Heart Of Oak*, about folk singer Norma Waterson.

RICHARD HAWLEY
Standing At The Sky's Edge (2012)
Immersive, angry and absolutely brimming with great guitar playing, this 2012 release was nominated for the Mercury Prize.

THE LONGPIGS
The Sun Is Often Out (1996)
Hawley's big break came in one of Britpop's more intelligent outfits, whose underrated debut yielded several anthemic singles.

AND ANOTHER THING... Hawley's 2006 album *Coles Corner* was also nominated for the Mercury Music Prize. Alex Turner, of Prize winners Arctic Monkeys, quipped: "Someone call 999, Richard Hawley's been robbed".

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Blame it on the boogie...

An encounter with Jools Holland led Mark Flanagan into a remarkable career as part of the TV star's Rhythm and Blues Orchestra, playing alongside some true musical greats...

Story and photography **Bob Hewitt**

If you're tuning into boogie-woogie maestro Jools Holland and his Rhythm And Blues Orchestra this New Year's Eve – rocking out of 2015 with his annual Hootenanny TV extravaganza, take a peek over his shoulder.

You'll see a guy in trendy threads with a snazzy brim – oh, and a rather cool 60s Gibson ES-335... that's Mark Flanagan.

Born in Liverpool, and influenced from an early age by Edward Flanagan – his guitar-playing dad – Mark honed his skills on the ukulele before moving onto six strings. Following excursions with Little Ginny and later The Box Brothers, a 27-year tenure with Holland has further broadened Flanagan's playing expertise.

Having backed up artists ranging from Tom Jones to Ellie Goulding and Buddy Greco to Ed Sheeran, Flanagan can slip into the styles of Charlie Christian, Django Reinhardt, T-Bone Walker or Chuck Berry, playing whatever's needed to suit his band leader. When that band leader is Jools Holland, you can expect a selection from Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Woody Herman, Glen Miller, BB King and Solomon Burke. His studio credits include playing with George Harrison, whom he describes as "memorably melodic" on the former Beatle's final solo album. He's also an accomplished Dobro and acoustic player – having released several albums under his own name.

Holland speaks highly of his long-time guitar player: "Mark plays little figures that fit perfectly with my busy left hand – he's the first person I've known to do it," he says. "Mark understands everything from jump-jive to modern music – he can swing, then rock it... Eric Clapton describes Mark as a truly great guitarist."

Flanagan thanks his dad for setting him on the six-string path: "I was very fortunate, because my dad played guitar; and like a lot of men from his generation in Liverpool, he went to sea in the late 40s and 50s. He bought a lovely dance band guitar in Australia – which I still have, and have just had rebuilt by guitar maker Martyn Booth.

"In the mid-60s, he came home with a ukulele. My brother and sister didn't really bother with it – but I stuck at it – and we played together for the next three or four years, until I was 12, when I got my first real guitar. It was a Barnes & Mullins flat top – with a DeArmond pickup attached. We would play or practise three or four times a week – old favourites like *Who's Sorry Now* or *Ain't Misbehaving*. My dad was very encouraging – and very patient. All the family would join in with three-part harmonies, and that 'musical sense' was all around the house.

> "Mark understands everything from jump-jive to modern music – he can swing, then rock it"
> **JOOLS HOLLAND**

"He told me about open E tuning when I was only about 13 or 14 – and how to play slide. I thought it was interesting, but didn't really look at it again until 30 years later when I bought a Dobro.

"I noticed when I was playing with him on ukulele, the same chords were popping up – but in a slightly different order... like the same game, but on a different field. He also talked to me a lot about phrasing – and said I should listen to the likes of Frank Sinatra if I wanted to know how to sing. I didn't really worry about keys from then on – the patterns sort of joined up for me, so when I changed to guitar I knew where I was already. I used to watch George Formby doing the 'scissors' thing and I tried to play like that – but it was 40 years later when Joe Brown showed me how to drag the thumb across the strings, to get that syncopation. I still can't do it!

"My dad used to bring records back from overseas, too. I heard Hank Snow, Hank Williams and Hank Thompson – all the Hanks – on 78rpm discs! When I got my guitar – a B&M Country King – >

Mark's dad Edward with the Wilson dance band guitar he bought in Australia

Flanagan in live action with Jools Holland on the keyboard, Christopher Holland on organ and Dave Swift on bass

that was the music I cut my teeth on in terms of playing rhythm, because obviously I couldn't get near 'the master' [Django Reinhardt]!"

Growing up in Liverpool saw the young Flanagan being surrounded by influential music. "I went to see *A Hard Day's Night* when I was about six years old," he recalls. "I was astonished at all the girls screaming. I missed out on the Merseybeat era in a way – so I was listening to a lot of country music by the time I was starting to play with bands in the mid-70s. Kenny Johnson and Northwind and The Hillsiders were big in Liverpool at that time. I was playing with Little Ginny during that period – we played the big Mervyn Conn country festivals at Wembley or Brighton a couple of times. That was the first time my father saw me on the TV. There was a close-up of the fingerboard for a few seconds – dad recognised the ring I was wearing and shouted 'that's our Mark's hand!'.

"We were listening to The Ozark Mountain Daredevils, Asleep At The Wheel, and all the people doing Western Swing. For me, it tied in with the Django thing – his swing and the country influence of 'the Hanks'.

"I wasn't really old enough to see or appreciate The Cavern-era Merseybeat bands like the Clayton Squares and the St. Louis Checks, but I was aware it was a great time in Liverpool."

The Jools Holland job has brought Flanagan into contact with some of his musical heroes. "One of the reasons I got Gregg Allman to sign the back of my guitar is because he came in to do a radio show with Jools when we [the rhythm section] were there in the studio," he remembers. "He was just chatting with Jools, when I realised what a real legend he was. I used to listen to The Allman Brothers when his brother Duane was alive and played the slide and all that. Everyone had an Allman Brothers album! I occasionally ask people to sign things – especially if they've been an influence on me.

"There's Ry Cooder, Little Feat with Lowell George – and the New Orleans stuff like The Meters and Dr. John. But on the playing side, it's difficult because there are so many great players around! There's Eric Clapton and Danny Kortchmar, Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter and a bunch of West Coast players like Waddy Wachtel with Warren Zevon, and David Lindley with Jackson Browne... oh and Rory Gallagher. You couldn't grow up in the 70s and not be touched by his playing. From the reggae world, there is Ernest Ranglin and I enjoy Al Anderson's work with The Wailers. Of course, there's the 'Three Kings'. It was a real thrill when BB King played on Hootenanny – memorable."

The move to London and initial meeting with Holland came about through Flanagan's work with Little Ginny, and a busking stint in Edinburgh secured the Jools gig.

"Playing country with Little Ginny, we did a festival in Brighton and met up with The Hank Wangford Band – and became good friends with Paul Fitzgerald. He said if we were ever up in Suffolk to look them up. We played lots of gigs in Lowestoft and the Suffolk area, and I really liked the place – so moved there to live. Then I moved to London – met Jools, and lived there for 15 years.

"I'd started a group up in Suffolk called The

Flanagan with the Stan Francis acoustic that was hand built for him in Liverpool

STAN'S THE MAN

"The only guitar I've ever bought new is my Stan Francis acoustic," says Flanagan. "He was a guitar maker in Liverpool from the 1960s through to the 80s – he's made guitars for The Spinners and Rory McEwen. He was a friend of Little Ginny's husband, so whenever we needed a guitar setting up, we would go and see Stan. Hanging on the wall of his house in West Derby there were always a couple of nice guitars. I saw this one – no machineheads and not quite finished, sort of work in progress. I kept asking, 'Is it finished yet Stan?'. I asked him over and over, like a running joke! Then I asked again in about 1977 and he said yes, so we agreed a price of £150. It's mahogany back, sides and neck with an ebony fingerboard and a really tight Norwegian spruce top – it's a most beautiful instrument and a wonderful guitar."

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The Dobro that Flanagan found for sale at Macari's in London. It has a P-90 in the neck and LR Baggs in the bridge

Box Brothers with Paul and Delphi Newman; we met up with a London-based theatre group called The Greatest Show On Legs – and we did a lot of shows together with Martin Soan and comic legend [the late] Malcolm Hardee. It transpires that Malcolm had a room in Greenwich – and who lived across the road? Jools Holland.

"Later on, Delphi and I had a duo called The Music Lovers, so we linked up with Malcolm and went to Edinburgh to do a three-week stint. We provided the music and Malcolm did his comedy slot. In the evenings, Delphi and I would go busking, and that's when Jools saw us. He was filming with Muriel Gray for the BBC at that time, and I think he was quite taken with Delphi's style of singing and my swing guitar playing. Halfway through our stay in Edinburgh, Jools' sax player had to return to London to fulfil another commitment – so Jools invited me to fill in, and we've been together ever since."

Flanagan recalls late-night big band record listening sessions at Holland's house – taking note of what the guitar player was doing in the background – often a repetitive riff of four or five notes that fitted over all the chords.

"A lot of it came down to our parents' record collections. Jools' parents and my parents had similar tastes. We'd come back from the pub, and Jools would start playing a Ray Charles tune – and I'd know the bridge 'cos my dad was a big Ray Charles fan too."

The television work can be demanding, and Flanagan singles out Hootenanny, which has become a New Year's Eve institution, as the most taxing of the shows he works on. "When we do Hootenanny, that is a bit of a marathon. We rehearse day one, on the Monday of the week we are recording the show, with just the band. Tuesday, we go to the studio, do a soundcheck, then they start running the cameras and we play the tunes with two or three of the guests. Wednesday, we rehearse with the rest of the guests and then in the evening we record the show.

> "Jeff Beck was amazing. I nearly forgot to play. I was mesmerised by what he was doing"

The Tuesday Later shows are great because they're live and have a lot of edginess. I've played for 27 years with Jools and had to play lots of different things, so I guess that's why my style is quite diverse, because I try to play whatever is the right flavour for the tune. The one thing Jools doesn't want us to do is imitate to the nth degree."

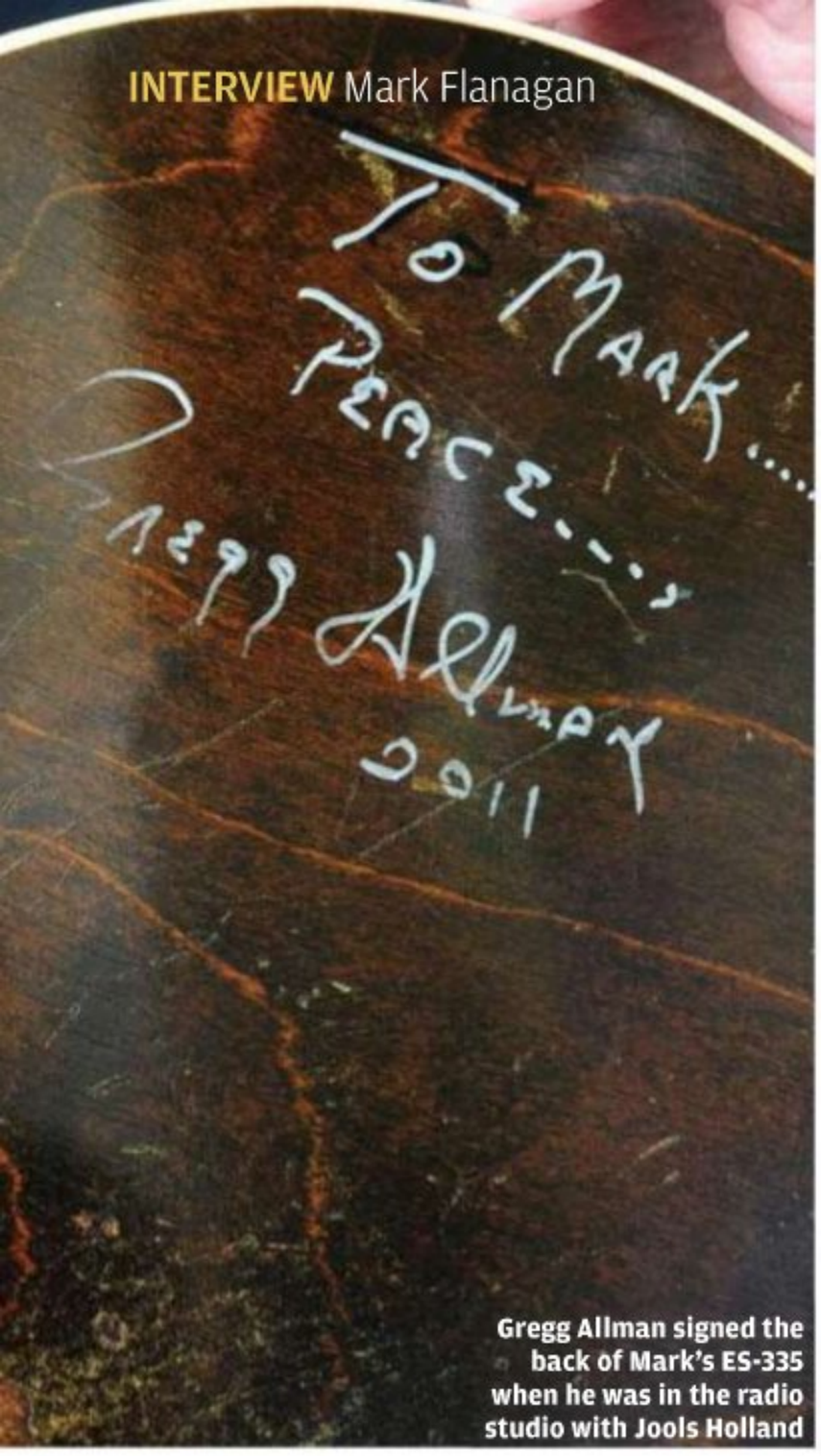
Playing alongside some of the world's most talented and famous musicians is all part of the job for Flanagan. "I've been fortunate to play alongside some memorable artists," he says. "Amy Winehouse was so special – she did a radio show with us before *Back To Black* came out, and we had to learn *Love Is A Losing Game* in front of her, having never heard the track! We've played with Eric Clapton several times, he's a fabulous guitarist and really nice guy. Mark Knopfler is another superb player I admire. He was setting up in the recording studio with us and he pulled this beautiful 1954 blonde Gibson Super 400 out of the case – prettiest thing I've ever seen. I said, 'Wow man – that's a pretty guitar'. Mark said, 'You've got to play it to know it' – and he handed it to me.

"The neck pickup was pure jazz guitar – just as you'd expect, warm and 'Gibsony'; the middle pickup was like an acoustic, you could have got away with playing dance band stuff, even folky stuff. But the back pickup – oh! Turn it up a bit and suddenly it's like T-Bone Walker and it's screaming, so responsive, a great guitar.

"Jeff Beck was amazing. We did *Drown In My Own Tears* three times with him – once in the studio, again on Hootenanny, and also at the Albert Hall. When he was at the Albert Hall, he really took off man, I tell you, I nearly forgot to play because I was just mesmerised by what he was doing."

Flanagan has been getting some use out of his dad's old guitar, using it on the Rhythm and Blues Orchestra album *Sirens Of Song*.

"It's a Wilson that was made in Australia with an Indonesian hardwood fingerboard. Martyn has done a beautiful job of rebuilding it, but it's an F-hole cello guitar with flatwound strings, so no good for country twang! But it's quite good for blues, as it has that old-fashioned 1930s sound to it. When you hit the chords, it sounds pretty >



Gregg Allman signed the back of Mark's ES-335 when he was in the radio studio with Jools Holland

The headstock of Flanagan's '67 has a similar appearance to Larry Carlton's ES-335

The original finish on Mark's guitar was stripped to natural many years ago

dead, but my dad always said it's a drum – a rhythm instrument and a dance band instrument. Anyway, last year we did a few swing tracks for the album, one with Emeli Sandè called *Love Me Or Leave Me* – and the two or three tracks I used my dad's guitar on; suddenly, it sounds like a big band. Even though it just goes 'thwack' and doesn't resonate too much, if you put a mic on it and get the levels right it disappears into the drum kit – somewhere between the snare and the hi-hat – so it becomes a sort of melodic snare drum. You hear the changes, but you don't really hear anything else. I was so pleased, and my dad would have been made up because it fitted right in with the 'sonic' of the whole thing with the horn section and everything else – it's perfect."

A Gibson ES-335 is Flanagan's main live guitar these days, the fulfilment of a lifelong ambition: "It's a 1967, and the finish on the front has been removed – it's just the natural wood. I'd been playing my old Strat with Jools, but I'd wanted a 335 since I was a kid.

"I got the chance through a friend in London who used to work for The Rolling Stones. He had a 335 and very kindly lent it to me for a few months. I played a few gigs with Jools and realised it was a lovely guitar – and that I should probably buy it! So I've had it since 1990, but before that, I was a Strat man. I play it through a 1958 tweed Fender Twin."

The '67 ES-335 has survived a few scrapes over the years, with one incident in particular almost leading to its untimely demise.

"I packed up my gear into the back of my estate car," Flanagan remembers. "I left the 335 leaning against the side of the car, slammed the tailgate and drove off. I was about a mile out of Harrogate when I realised what I'd done. I drove back and there was the guitar – on the road in a soft case, soaking wet in the rain with a tyre mark over it! I couldn't even look – I just put the case in the back of the car and went home. When I plucked up the courage to look, just the edges of the volume and tone knobs had broken off, so a car must have just brushed it, rather than driven right over it. It's had a charmed life – oh, and the headstock inlays have shrunk over the years and fallen out like damaged teeth!

> "I'm lucky to have met Jools. What we've done together is pretty astonishing'"

"I bought my Dobro from Macari's on Charing Cross Road, having [previously] borrowed a 1930s one from a friend of a friend. I finally got around to the open tuning thing – and remembered what my dad had told me all those years before.

"I was looking around Macari's when I saw this silver one and started to play it, but the action had been set up too low.

"I thought it had potential, with a nice P-90 in the neck and an LR Baggs in the bridge. I decided to take a chance on it, it's really open and has gorgeous tone. It's great – I love that guitar."

Mark and Jools at the Hampton Court Palace Festival in 2012
Getty Images

From those humble beginnings jamming with his dad, Flanagan has come a long way in music and is grateful that fate engineered the meeting between he and Holland that changed the trajectory of his musical career.

"Well, when I first started, I didn't even think of it as a 'career'," he laughs. "But looking back over 40-odd years of playing, I can see that I've been very lucky. I'm lucky that I met some great players early on – and lucky to meet Jools. That was a real step up; and what we've done together over nearly three decades is pretty astonishing."

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10 TOP TIPS *Jon Gomm*

Jon Gomm is a true fingerstyle virtuoso. Here, he shares his advice on becoming a better acoustic player and songwriter...

Interview **Gary Walker**

1 Don't hit your guitar too hard

This is one of the first things I tell people when I do workshops about playing drums on acoustic guitar. You have to do it really softly and sensitively. This is for three reasons. The first is the tone – if you hit a kick drum sound on a guitar really hard and then, say, a bongo sound in a slightly different place or with a different part of your hand, if you hit them hard they'll sound pretty much the same, because the attack is loud. If you play them softly, suddenly the attack gets quieter, and you can hear the sustain of the tone a lot more and your kick drum will sound completely different from your bongo. If you do it hard, it sounds like somebody building a shed. The second point is, if you do it softly you get a balance between the percussion and the guitar playing. The third, and some would say most important, reason is you're not going to break your guitar!

2 Avoid the curse of the backbeat

There's nothing wrong with a four-to-the-floor backbeat, kick drum on beat one and three, and the snare on two and four, and you get this syndrome where guitarists will play a fingerstyle tune and then slap the strings on beats two and four and occasionally make a kick drum sound on one and three. What they sound like is not even the worst drummer, they sound like a metronome. They could add the same colour to their music by just switching on a metronome. You need to be creative, don't just settle for the most obvious thing that only a drummer in their first lesson would ever use. Try to create grooves that are interesting by moving the drum beats off the obvious beats.

3 Learn a new scale or a new mode today

Electric guitarists are quite often OK with scales and modes. A lot of electric guitarists might know about the Lydian mode, for example, and know that it's the one that Joe Satriani likes, or the one that Steve Vai likes, but a lot of acoustic players will be, like, 'Lydian, I have no idea what that is!' It's really easy to learn a scale – just go on to the internet or open up your guitar magazine and learn the notes of the scale and then figure out how to play it on the guitar – just with one finger going up and down one string is a really good way to do it, and then put the notes together to make a chord. *Passionflower*, my most famous song, is in the Lydian mode, and I deliberately did that, and that's why it sounds interesting and different to

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people, because not many people write with that scale. Songwriters and composers can learn a scale and then use it immediately, that's what I recommend.

4 Get a good pickup system

The way to think about your pickups in an acoustic guitar is that you're starting from scratch and building a sound from nothing. The sound of your acoustic guitar doesn't matter that much, but if you really love the sound of your acoustic guitar and when you play concerts that's what you want to hear, you need to sit in front of a microphone – there's no other way of doing it. But I get a much better sound with pickups, that enables me to get a rich percussion sound and use overdrive if I want to. Pickups allow you to sculpt a three-dimensional sound. I've got a humbucker in the soundhole that has a microphone attached to it, and that comes out through a separate output. I also have a transducer stuck on the soundboard and three separate outputs from the guitar, EQ'd separately, and they all do different jobs. Everyone I know on the circuit uses at least three sounds from the guitar. The magnetic pickup in the soundhole is really good for creating a rich, warm midrange and really good for the bass on the strings, whereas a microphone inside the guitar is really good for treble and for percussion. By having those two sounds you can make a really good guitar sound, but the guitar they're inside is less important than you might realise.

6 BUILD YOUR SONGS AROUND EXTENDED TECHNIQUES

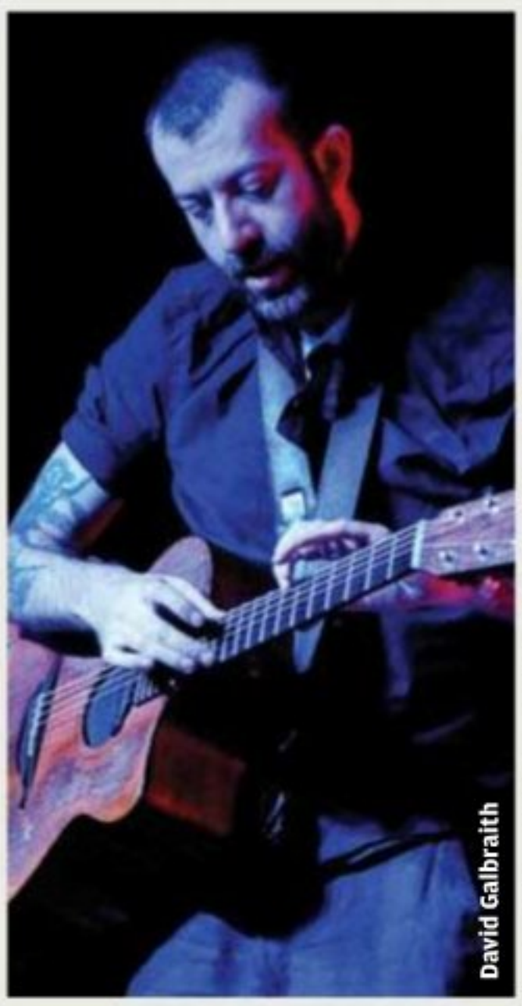
If people are interested in new techniques on acoustic guitar, of which there are now many, use them to compose and make them part of a tune. Another curse of modern fingerstyle guitar is people will write a fingerstyle piece, it sounds kind of like a regular tune and suddenly there's this slapped harmonic, a violent, high-pitched loud sound that just kind of appears. That's not necessarily the end of the world, it can sound good, but what you'll find with guys such as myself and my good friend Andy McKee is when there's a slapped harmonic in the tune, it'll be holding a melody note, it'll be a crucial part of the tune, rather than a weird overdub that's just been dropped on top. Include those techniques from the start, don't add them in later because it won't work and they won't fit.

Phil Ermiya

David Galbraith

"Go into a new tuning that you've never used before and try to write something immediately"

guitar'. One thing I do a lot as a luddite guitarist who's terrible at reading music, is write in my head. You'll often find me hiding away in a hotel room or in the bathroom at home, singing a bassline into my phone, or a melody. Quite often, if I'm listening to the radio I'll hear a little something in a melody that I like and want to use, and I'll sing those notes and somewhere later they'll get incorporated into a song. I've just written a song, and the melody of the chorus is based around a Jeff Buckley live CD, where he improvises a little pentatonic fill with his vocal. I loved it so much that I expanded it into an entire chorus for this song. >


David Galbraith

5 USE OPEN TUNING AS A ROOT TO CREATIVITY

Some people will tune their guitar to DADGAD and then once they're there try to learn a load of chords, maybe some scales and songs in that tuning, but what I'd recommend is go into a new tuning you've never used before and try to write something immediately. Explore it a bit, but try to see what is possible just by moving your fingers around. It sounds like a bit of a 'caveman' way of writing music, but it's very liberating and it's what a lot of the great songwriters from the past have done. If you imagine Kurt Cobain writing the riff from *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, he's clearly taken that powerchord and moved it round to places where it will sound good. That's such a great way to write. Almost everything that's possible in standard tuning has maybe been done, and as soon as you tune into a different tuning you can take that 'writing with your fingers' approach and find things nobody's ever done before.

7 Compose away from your guitar

This really frightens guitarists, for the same reason that reading music frightens guitarists. They think that if they don't have a guitar in their hands that they can make sound with they can't express themselves musically. People always joke 'what's the best way to shut up a guitarist? To put sheet music in front of them'. Even better for me is to say, 'What's a good way of stopping a guitarist from being a musician? Take away their

David Galbraith

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Lee Thompson

8 Sit properly

There are two elements to this: one is your hands and wrists, the other is posture. Every time I play guitar or do a gig, afterwards I stretch. I have five or six stretches on each hand, my fingers, palms and tendons from my forearms through to my fingers. That's how you avoid getting injured. It is an unnatural activity and not very good for you. Nearly 15 years ago, I had tendonitis in my shoulder and had to have surgery. Since then, as you might expect, I've been very careful about stretching and posture. It's difficult to put it across in text, but if you're worried about your posture or get any kind of pain, discomfort or numbness you need to find out what's wrong with your posture, the sooner the better. Don't take it lightly, I've been there and it's not great.

9 Try to recreate non-guitar music on the guitar

"I always suggest that acoustic guitarists try to recreate the sound of other instruments"

A lot of young acoustic guitarists now sound as if they're influenced by Andy Mckee, Antoine Dufour, Don Ross, Michael Hedges or me. You can hear that, but you can't hear anything else, it's just guitaristic input. I always suggest that acoustic guitarists try to recreate the sound of other instruments. I do it all the time in my composition. I try to make my guitar sound like I'm an 80s synth-pop band, or a dub reggae band or a jazz trio. I'm thinking both in terms of the genre that I'm playing and the sounds I hear in that music. I'm always gunning for both things at the same time. It's an approach that tends to get people out of compositional ruts.

10 BE YOURSELF AS A MUSICIAN

It's quite to hard to do, or to figure out what this means, but the more of yourself you put into your music the more likely it is to be unique and interesting. There are questions you can ask yourself before you start writing your next song. Why are you going to write this music? What's the purpose of it? Some people just want to make a pretty sound or make music that people can dance to, and they're totally valid things. But for me, the way you can really invest yourself into the music is by thinking, 'What's the motivation? Why should this music exist? What will it bring to the world that's different or valid?'

There's a lot of music in history that's protest music, and that barely exists now. I'm the only person I'm aware of among my peer group in fingerstyle that writes songs about protesting against the actions of my own government, for example. There's no reason why fingerstlye guitar, or pop music, should be reduced to just being a nice noise that people put in their ears, when over the decades of pop it's fulfilled such vital functions in society.

I met Nile Rodgers last year; he was showing me the chord changes in *Good Times*. The chords are really weird, and I thought that it must be a jazz thing, but actually it's not. He's classically trained and loads of the chords he uses are thought about in this method of voice leading that's taken purely from classical training. All he wants to do as a musician is make people feel good, but he's also got things he wants to do musically and intellectually that are really exciting and innovative, and that's a reason for that music to exist beyond just being disco.

LISTEN UP

JON GOMM
Live In The Acoustic Asylum (2015)

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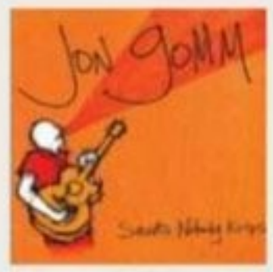
JON GOMM
Secrets Nobody Keeps (2013)



Gomm's most recent studio album features dizzying patterns, melancholy moments and his most famous release to date – *Passionflower*, the video for which has nearly 10 million YouTube views.

JON GOMM
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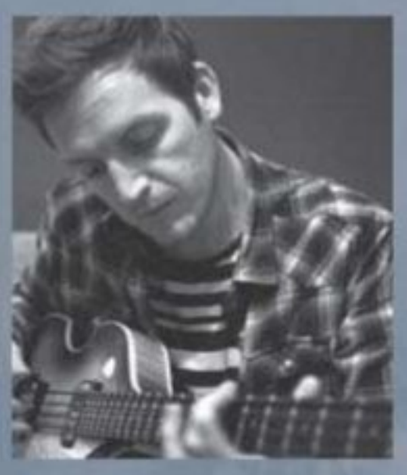

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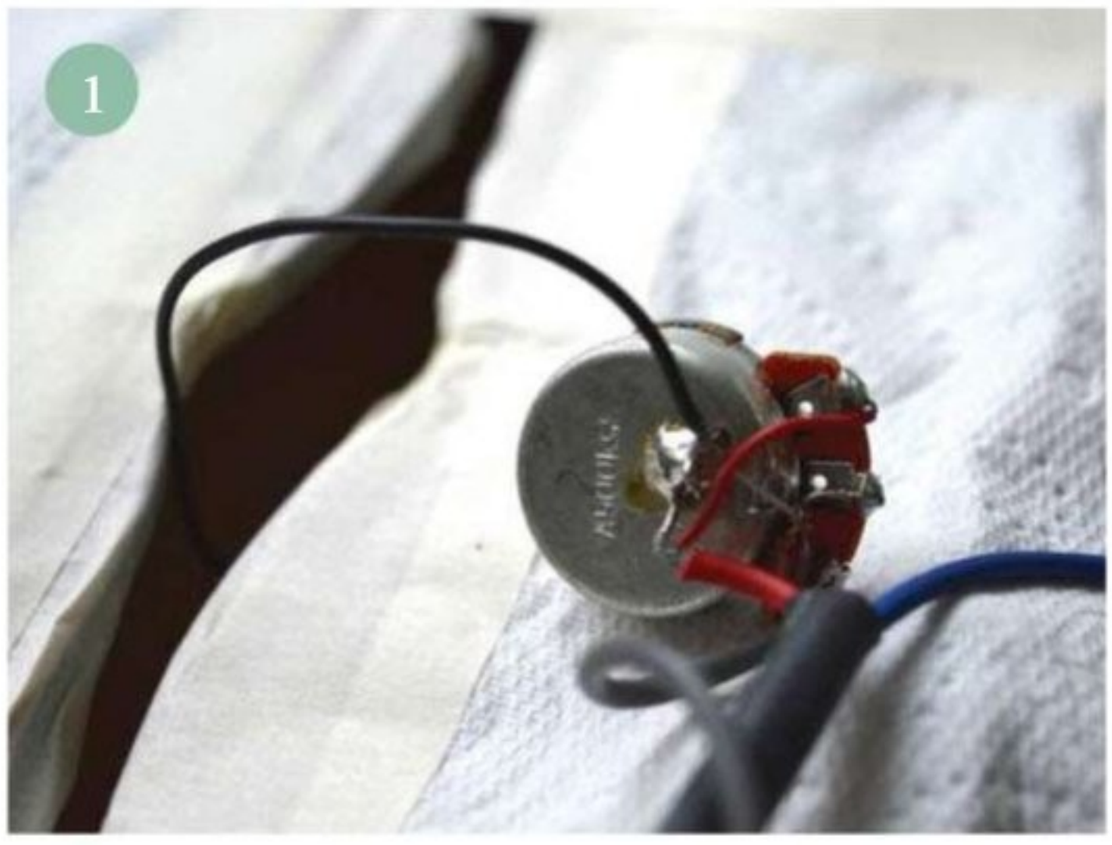
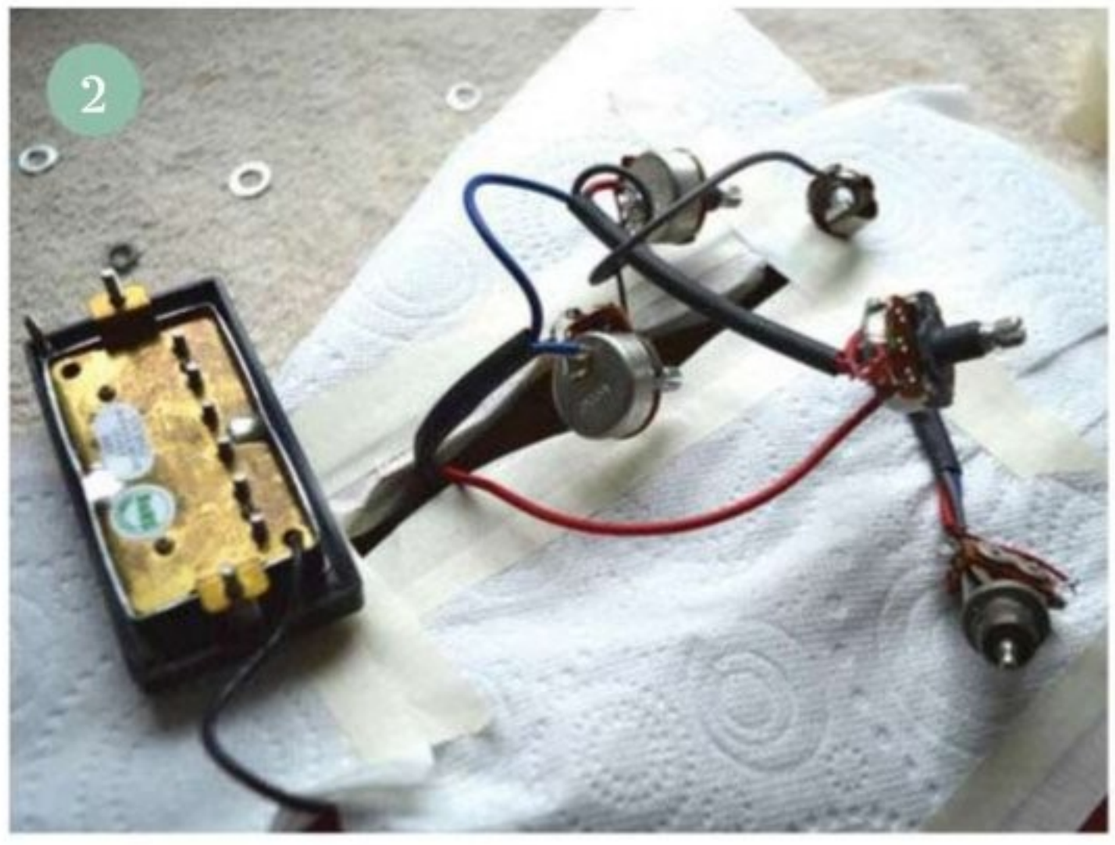
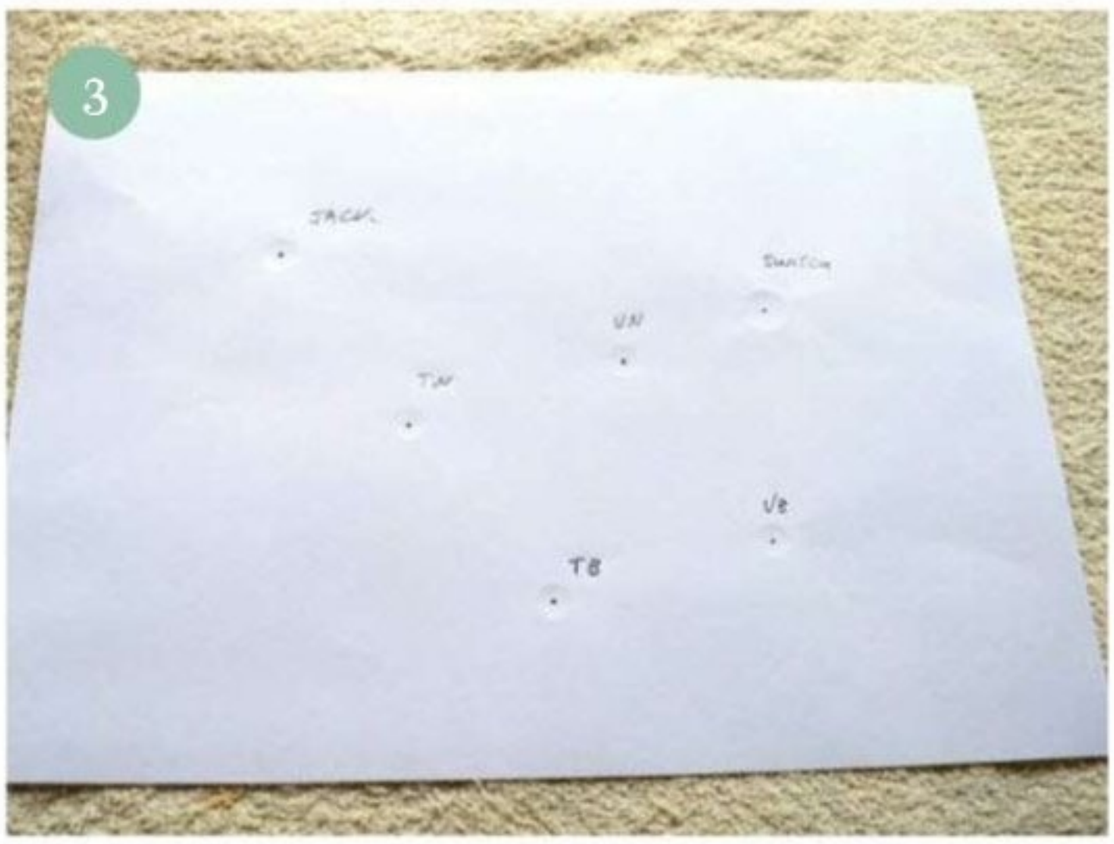
DIY WORKSHOP

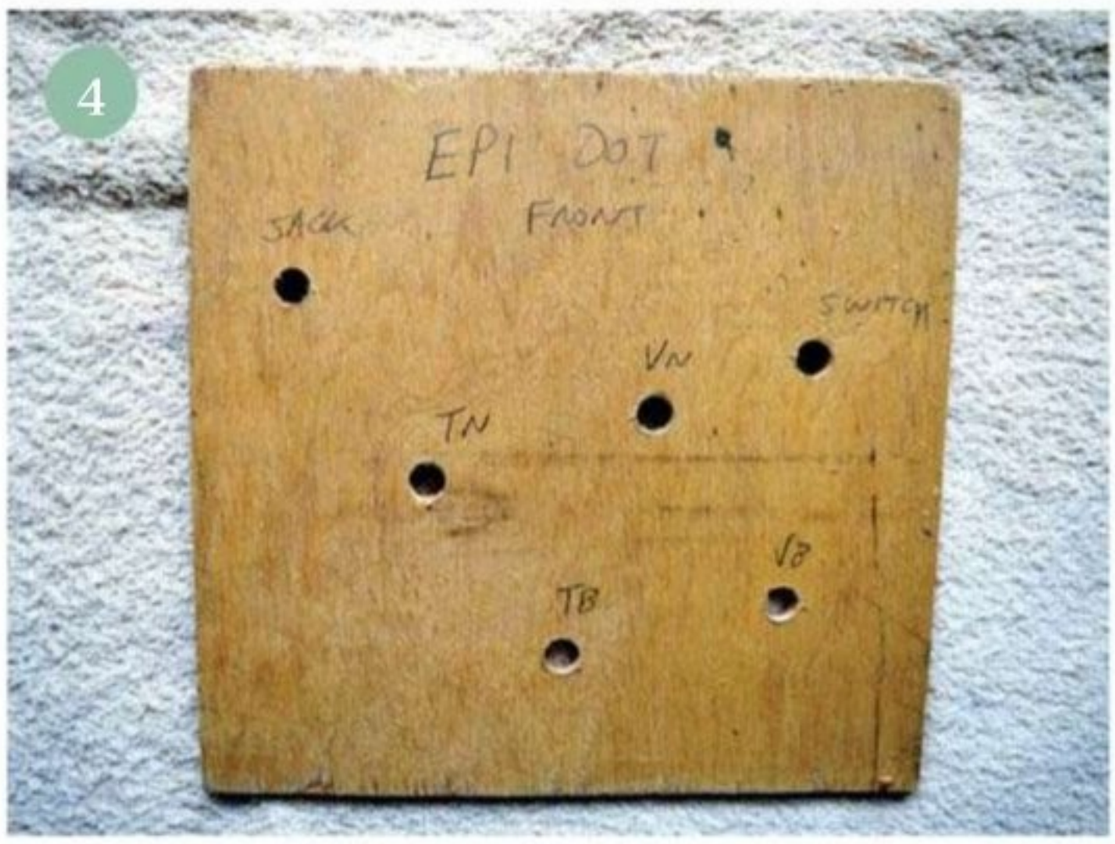
EPIPHONE DOT RENOVATION

Tom Turner's well-used Epiphone Dot was starting to show its age, so he decided a new set of pickups and an upgraded wiring harness were the way to go. **HUW PRICE** falls down the F-hole









1 The ground wire was originally soldered to the casing of the bridge volume pot. It's important to keep the ground wire safe and remember to reconnect it to a ground point on the new wiring harness

2 Here's the original wiring harness after it had been extracted through the F-hole. Once the pickup wires and ground wire are disconnected, it can be removed completely

3 Placing a sheet of paper over the holes and pressing each hole with your finger will mark the position of the holes onto the paper. Then mark the centre of each hole with a pen

4 Holes for the hardware were drilled out to the required sizes and then labelled front and rear

Not long after I had first started playing guitar, I took the semi-solid I was playing at the time to a local luthier to ask him how much it would cost to replace the dodgy output socket. "It won't cost you a thing," he replied. When I asked why, he answered, "because I'm not bloody doing it".

He told me rewiring a semi-solid electric was one of the most difficult and fiddly of all guitar repairs and something he hated doing. So I decided to do it myself and two weeks later, when I had finally managed to reassemble my guitar, I had to concede he had a point.

Since then, I've rewired a fair few ES-style guitars. It's still not a process I find particularly easy or enjoyable, but at least it doesn't take me two weeks anymore. Working on solidbody electrics is so much easier than semis, but there always comes a time when the urge to upgrade becomes irresistible – or unavoidable if the controls get so bad the guitar can't be used.

Both scenarios applied to Tom's guitar. He wanted new pickups installed to improve the sound, but the control potentiometers and switch had seen better days. When the time for keyhole guitar surgery on a semi comes around, it seems sensible to do the whole lot while you're in there.

Parts

Tom decided on a set of Creamery humbuckers – a Custom '59 in the bridge and a Baby '71 in the neck. In addition, Tom asked me to install new CTS 500K audio taper potentiometers, replace the jack socket, upgrade the tone capacitors and wire them 50s-style to the volume controls. Although they look like electrolytics, the ones I used are actually vintage-style paper oil types called Black Bees. We decided to retain the switch. Tom fancied a set of vintage-style tuners to improve the looks and make the headstock lighter. Creamery pickups can be bought directly from the manufacturer (www.creamery-pickups.co.uk), and all the other parts we used are available from Allparts UK (www.allparts.uk).

Strip down

Begin by removing the strings, tailpiece and bridge, along with the tuners and scratchplate. It helps to have a container on hand when you're stripping down a guitar – as each part comes off, it goes straight in the container. Being diligent is the best way to avoid losing parts.

Here, I should distinguish between semi-solids, of the ES-335 variety, and semi-acoustics, of the ES-330/Casino variety. The former have a solid block running through the centre of the body, but the latter are completely hollow. With the fully hollow ones, you can often pull the wiring through the bridge pickup hole.

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Tom's Epiphone is a semi-solid, so the only option is to pull the wiring out through the treble-side F-hole. But before you start on a project such as this, try to look inside and locate the ground wire 1. With tune-o-matic-style bridges and tailpieces, the ground wire will probably lead off from the bridge area and may be soldered to the casing of one of the potentiometers.

When the pickups have metal braided wires, the earth wire is sometimes wrapped around the pickup wires and soldered in place. If the guitar has a Bigsby or trapeze tailpiece, the ground wire may pass through a hole in the tail block and be soldered or pressed against the tailpiece. Either way, the ground wire is important and must be reconnected later.

Before pulling everything apart, I pressed masking tape against the edges of the F-holes so the tape protected the finish from any sharp edges on the metal parts. You should surround the F-hole area with a protective covering. I use kitchen paper folded double and held in place with masking tape.

The nuts and washers were removed from the four potentiometers and the jack socket. Three-way toggle switches of this sort are held in position by a round nut, and getting them off using pliers risks scratching the top. Investing in the correct tool is money well spent, and I bought mine from Allparts UK.

All the parts were pushed down into the body and one by one they were pulled through the F-hole 2. Once the volume potentiometers were out of the guitar, I de-soldered the pickup wires and the ground wire. The pickup connections were snipped and the wiring was then removed from the guitar.

Hookup board

All the wiring for the new pots, switch and jack socket has to be done outside the guitar body. It's vital that you get the spacing of the parts correct, so the easiest method is to make a hookup board. Components can be mounted on the board in exactly the right positions while the soldering is being done. It's also wise to ensure that hot soldering irons spend as little time as possible in close proximity to the lacquer.

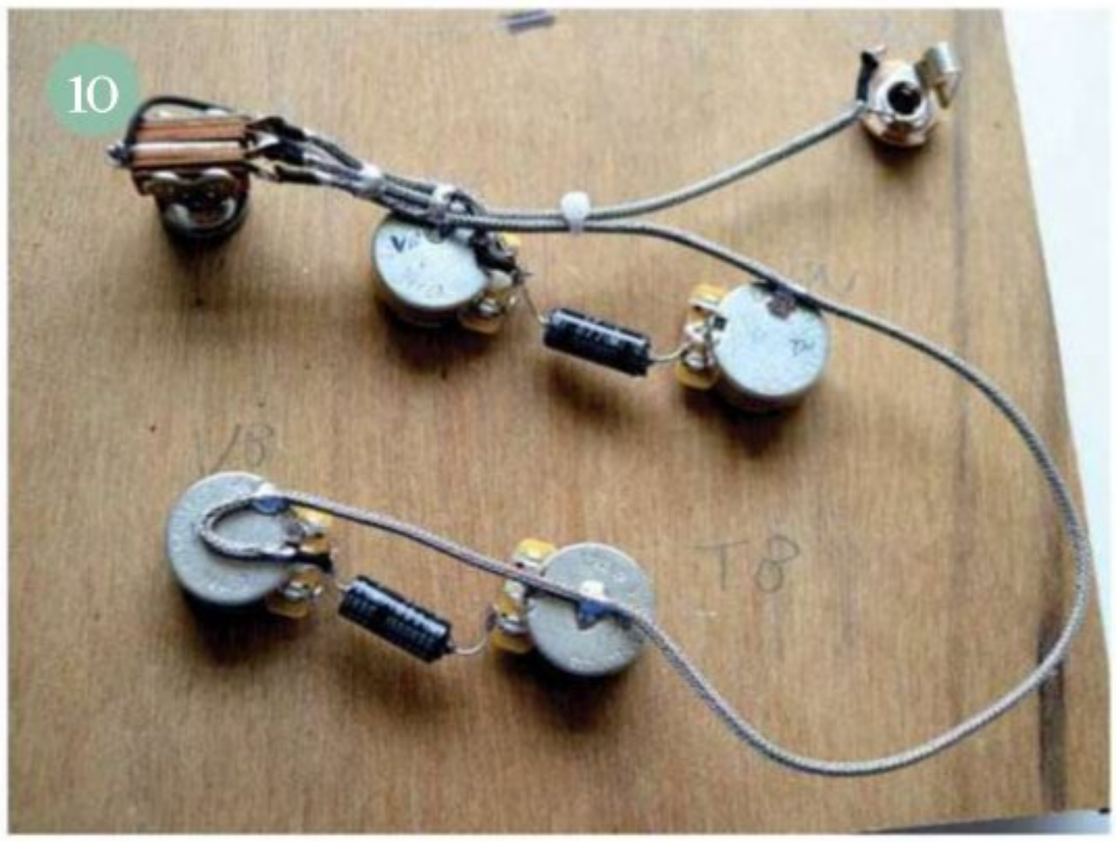
I placed a sheet of white A4 paper over all the holes then pressed down with my fingers to create impressions of the holes on the paper 3. After marking out the centre point of each hole with a black pen, I held the paper over a scrap piece of 5mm plywood and carefully tapped a nail through each pen mark to transfer the hole positions onto the wood. With a 3/8-inch bit, I drilled out the potentiometer and jack holes, and a step cutter was then used for the switch hole 4. Before mounting all the parts on the hookup board, >

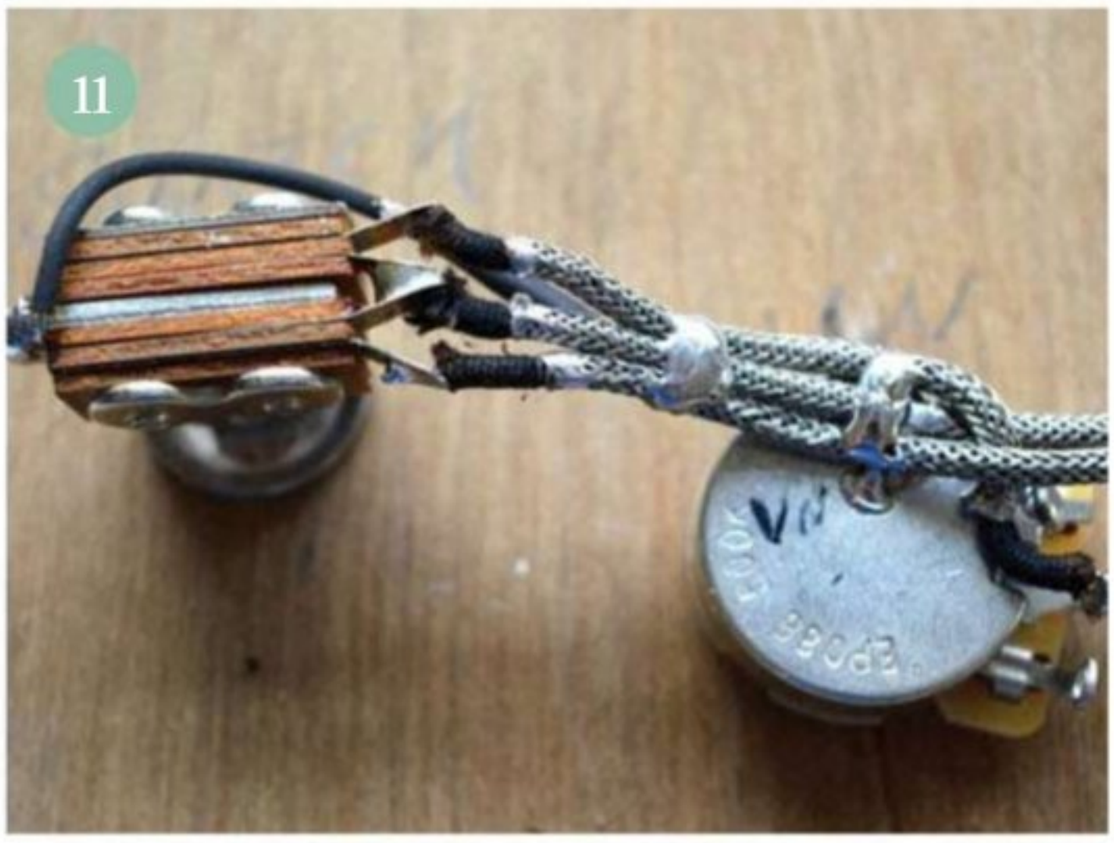
5 Using a step cutter is a safer option and it's the best way to make really wide holes. Here, you can see masking tape being used to mark the stop point

6 Here are the holes in the process of being widened. Note how the black ground wire is taped to the top of the body to stop it from falling back inside

7 The jack socket, switch and all the potentiometers are mounted onto the hookup board

8 Here are the components viewed from the rear of the board. Note how the solder tags of the potentiometers face each other





9 Start the soldering by making the four ground connections on the potentiometers and positioning the tone capacitors. The Black Bee paper/oil capacitors are only soldered to the tone pots

10 The wiring harness is complete. Note the long loop between the two tone pots on the right of the picture and the extra length of the capacitor leadout wires. Both help to make the installation easier

11 The Epiphone switch had a ground lug on the left. A ground wire was wrapped around all three braided wires to the right of the switch and soldered onto the braids and the switch itself

12 The jack socket and the neck tone potentiometer are about to go inside the body. Note the strings attached to the washer next to the jack socket. One string will be used to pull the socket into the body and the other will be used to pull the washer back out

don't forget to remove the locater tags from the potentiometers.

Widening the holes

Guitars manufactured in the Far East generally have components made to metric dimensions, but in the US everything is still imperial. The upshot was that the holes all needed to be enlarged in order for the CTS potentiometers and the Switchcraft jack socket we got from Allparts UK to fit.

Simply having a go at the existing holes with a 3/8-inch (or 10mm) drill bit could end in tears because there is a danger you will chip the finish around the holes. I prefer to use a step cutter bit, and after marking the stop point on the bit with masking tape I carefully widen the hole with the drill running at a fairly slow speed **5**.

The edges of the hole will taper and the potentiometer shafts may not push all the way through. To finish off, attach a regular 3/8-inch (10mm) drill bit and drill out the bottom of the hole. To avoid chip out on the underside, take care not to push down with the drill **6**.

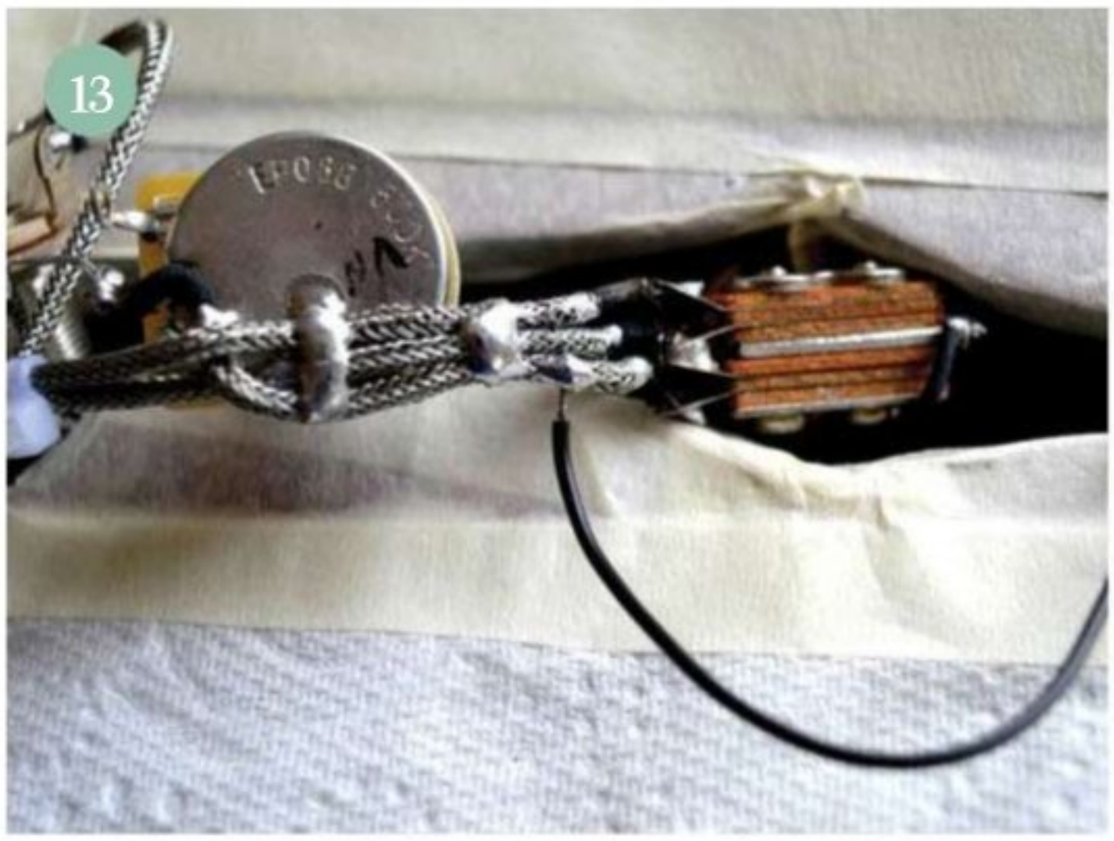
Hooking up

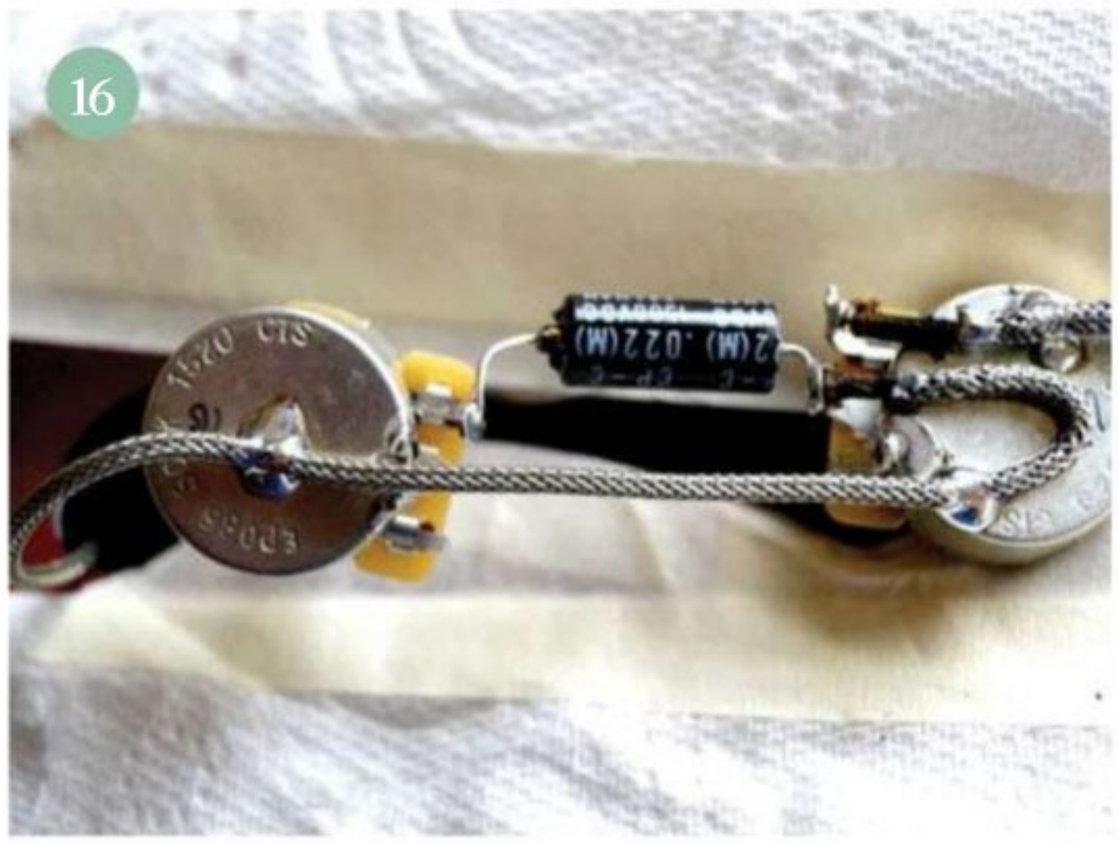
All the components were mounted on the hookup board and positioned for easy connections **7** & **8**. It makes sense to label the board and the potentiometers themselves so you know which is which. Everything is reversed because you are working from the back rather than the front. Download a wiring diagram, but take care if you're re-using the switch. The Far Eastern switch may have different connection tags to US ones.

I started out by bending the grounding tags on the potentiometers to touch the casings and soldered them together. Next, I connected the capacitors between the volume and tone pots **9**. The capacitors are connected to the centre tags of the volume controls, which is the way Gibson used to do it in the old days. I also left the leadout wires very slightly longer than they needed to be to allow some wiggle room in case the potentiometer shafts didn't quite line up with the holes.

The hardest part of the hookup is soldering the braided wire to the pot casings. To do this, you really need a powerful soldering iron, and I set mine to its maximum – 450 degrees. Follow the diagram carefully and feel free to use cable ties to hold things in position while you're soldering **10**.

Adjacent to the switch, a length of bare wire was wrapped around all three braided cables and soldered. Some heat shrink was slipped over the leadout and the other end was soldered to the switch ground lug **11**. I also allowed a longer than usual loop of wire between the two tone controls. My plan was to install the jack, both neck pickup controls





and the switch while both bridge pickup controls remained outside the body. I had tried the 'all at once' approach before and I figured this would be easier.

After checking all the connections by eye and testing them for continuity using a multimeter, I was pretty confident everything would work. At last, it was time to put everything back inside the guitar.

Re-installing the controls

Some people adopt the 'ship in a bottle' method and pass strings through each hole in the body. These are tied to the components then the strings are pulled to draw the pots, jack and switches through the holes. Rubber tubing is sometimes used, too. This might sound easy, but in my experience the strings tend to become tangled or fall off.

Instead, I used the string method only for the jack socket and the neck tone control. All the other parts are so close to the F-hole that you can use your fingers to position them. I pushed a length of solder wire through the jack socket hole and fished it out through the F-hole, tied some string to the solder wire and pulled the string back through the body then out of the jack hole.

The string was threaded through the jack socket and tied to a washer. A second length of string was also tied to the washer 12. I repeated the solder wire trick through the neck tone control hole and tied the string to the shaft of the tone pot.

The new neck pickup was placed in position and I fed its wire through the body and out of the F-hole. The jack socket and tone pot were pushed through the F-hole into the body, but I left the neck volume pot and switch outside. The ground wire was wrapped around the braided wire and soldered before I soldered the pickup wire to the volume pot 13.

After allowing everything to cool down, the neck volume pot and switch were passed into the body via the F-hole. The jack and tone control were pulled into postion and loosely held in place with their washers and nuts 14. You can usually push the volume control and switch through their holes using your fingers, but a thin screwdriver and long nose pliers can help, too. Once installed, they were also held in place by washers and bolts.

At this halfway point, the bridge volume and tone controls were still outside the body 15. The hookup process was repeated for the bridge pickup and both controls were then pushed inside and secured 16 and 17. I plugged in the guitar to test everything was working before tightening things up.

Tuner swap

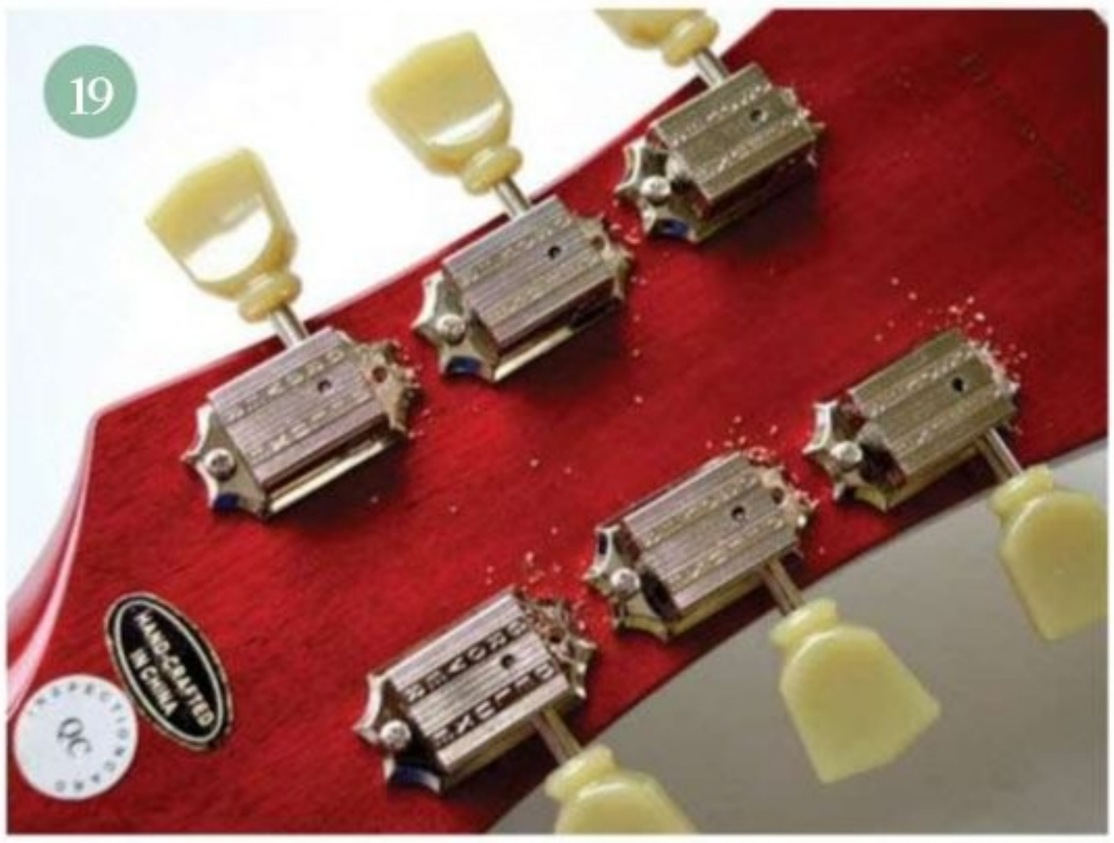
Compared to the rewiring, the tuner swap was effortless. The original

13 The ground wire is wrapped around the braided wires next to the switch just before the neck pickup is connected to its volume pot and the volume pot and switch are inserted through the F-hole

14 The jack socket and neck tone controls are in position and the nuts and washers are holding them in place but the strings are still in position. The neck volume pot and switch are about to be guided up into their holes

15 The neck volume pot and switch are not fixed in position but the bridge pickup control pots remain outside the body thanks to that long wire loop

16 The wire from the bridge pickup is soldered onto the volume pot and the controls are finally ready to go inside the body. When you are inserting the potentiometers, don't forget the knurled washers that will prevent them from spinning around



17 Everything's in. Don't forget to test it's all working before you tighten everything up and restring

18 The tuners are clamped in position with this bushing arrangement. Using the correct-sized socket is the best way to avoid scratching the metal plating and damaging your headstock

19 The bottom screw holes lined up with the original tuner screw holes, but pilot holes had to be drilled for the extra screws at the top

20 The new tuners look better and function more smoothly than the originals

kidney Grovers were removed by taking out the screws at the back of the headstock and using a socket wrench to undo the bushings.

Usually, vintage-style tuners require conversion bushes when they're being installed in place of die casts, but the Grovers Tom specified are vintage in looks only. They're actually 14:1 ratio die casts and they were direct replacements for the originals. Even the bottom screw holes more or less lined up.

I re-used the original screw holes and tightened the new bushings from the front 18. After drilling pilot holes, the upper screws for the new tuners were put in place and the job was complete 19 and 20. However, you could opt to use only the bottom screw holes if there's a possibility you might want to revert to the original tuners at some point.

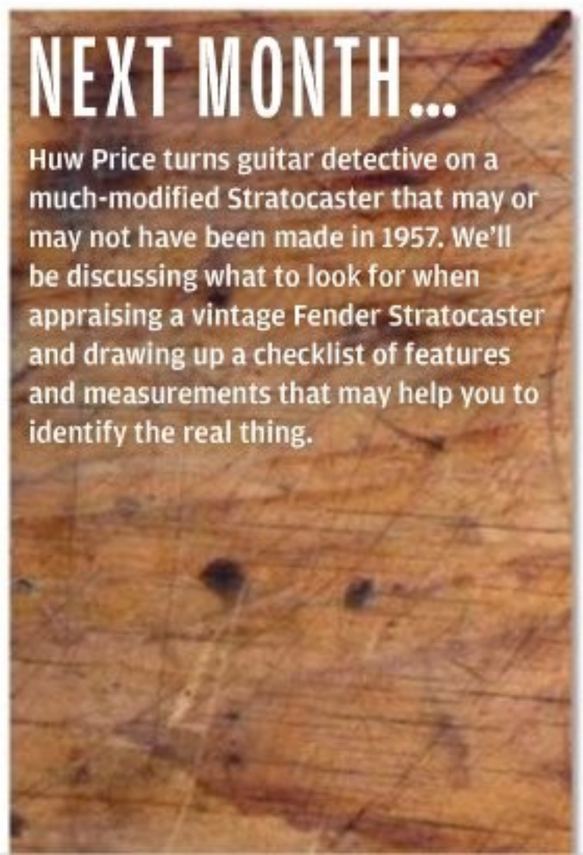
Verdict

I can say from experience that installing a new wiring harness is easier than trying to re-install an old one. I feel this job went smoothly because I was able to restrict the number of pull strings to two so nothing got tangled up. Leaving a slightly longer than usual cable loop between the tone pots allowed me to install the controls in stages rather than all at once. As it turned out, this rewire and pickup installation was relatively straightforward. The key is to be methodical and remain calm when things get fiddly.

The new pickups represent a significant upgrade on the stock items – clarity is retained when you turn the volume controls down, and the tone controls have a nice gradual response. I like the tuners a lot, too. The guitar seems to have a much better balance than it did before and they feel more precise. All things considered, I think this Epiphone Dot project was well worth the effort, and hopefully Tom will too.

PARTS LIST & SUPPLIERS

- **Toggle switch box spanner (Allparts LT-4201-023)**
- **Creamery Custom '59 & Baby '71 Pickups** www.creamery-pickups.co.uk
- **4x 500K CTS audio taper split shaft potentiometers (Allparts EP-0086-000)**
- **2x 0.022uF Black Bee paper/oil capacitors (Allparts EP-4397-000)**
- **Braided hookup wire (Allparts GW-0837-000)**
- **Long shaft Switchcraft mono jack socket (Allparts EP-055L-000)**
- **Grover 135 Vintage 14:1 ratio tuners (Allparts TK-7940-001)**



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TALKING 'SHOP

PERSONAL TOUCH

As the driving force behind Taran Guitars, Rory Dowling pours his heart and soul into his bespoke instruments. He takes **MARK ALEXANDER** on a guided tour of his workshop

Above **Rory Dowling provides a personal touch when building his acoustics**

Opposite page (left to right) **Rory; one of his elegant guitars; Taran's distinctive headstock logo**

Secret places are always the hardest to find. It's their job to be hidden away so that finding them is an achievement.

I certainly felt a rush when, after three phone calls and multiple u-turns, I eventually unearthed the discreet lair of Taran Guitars, which is tucked away at the end of a quiet country lane in rural Fife.

This is where the hugely talented Rory Dowling crafts his elegant acoustic guitars, each of which is tailored to its owner. Here, in a converted milking shed, he lovingly engineers his instruments to embody the playing styles of his customers who travel from across the UK, Europe and beyond to seek out his expertise. They are an eclectic bunch of journeyman musicians and passionate hobbyists, who arrive at his door to track down the elusive tones of a custom-made guitar that has been tweaked and refined to their exacting requirements. This is a world where off-the-shelf six-strings simply don't make the grade.

"My youngest client was 13," says Dowling proudly. "He busked in Inverness until he could pay for the guitar, and when he came to see me, he came with his busking money in shrapnel. I love building instruments, but when a 13-year-old has committed the last two years of his life to buying one of my guitars – that is serious. I was touched, really touched. It was incredible."

The young man's commitment is all the more impressive when you realise Dowling's guitars carry a standard price tag of around £3,000, with many of his clients opting for around £1,500 of extras such as arm bevels and silver purflings. Fortunately, the >

t.

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Rory carrying out repairs in part of his original workshop

Rory's extended workspace includes a consultation area where clients can relax and play guitars

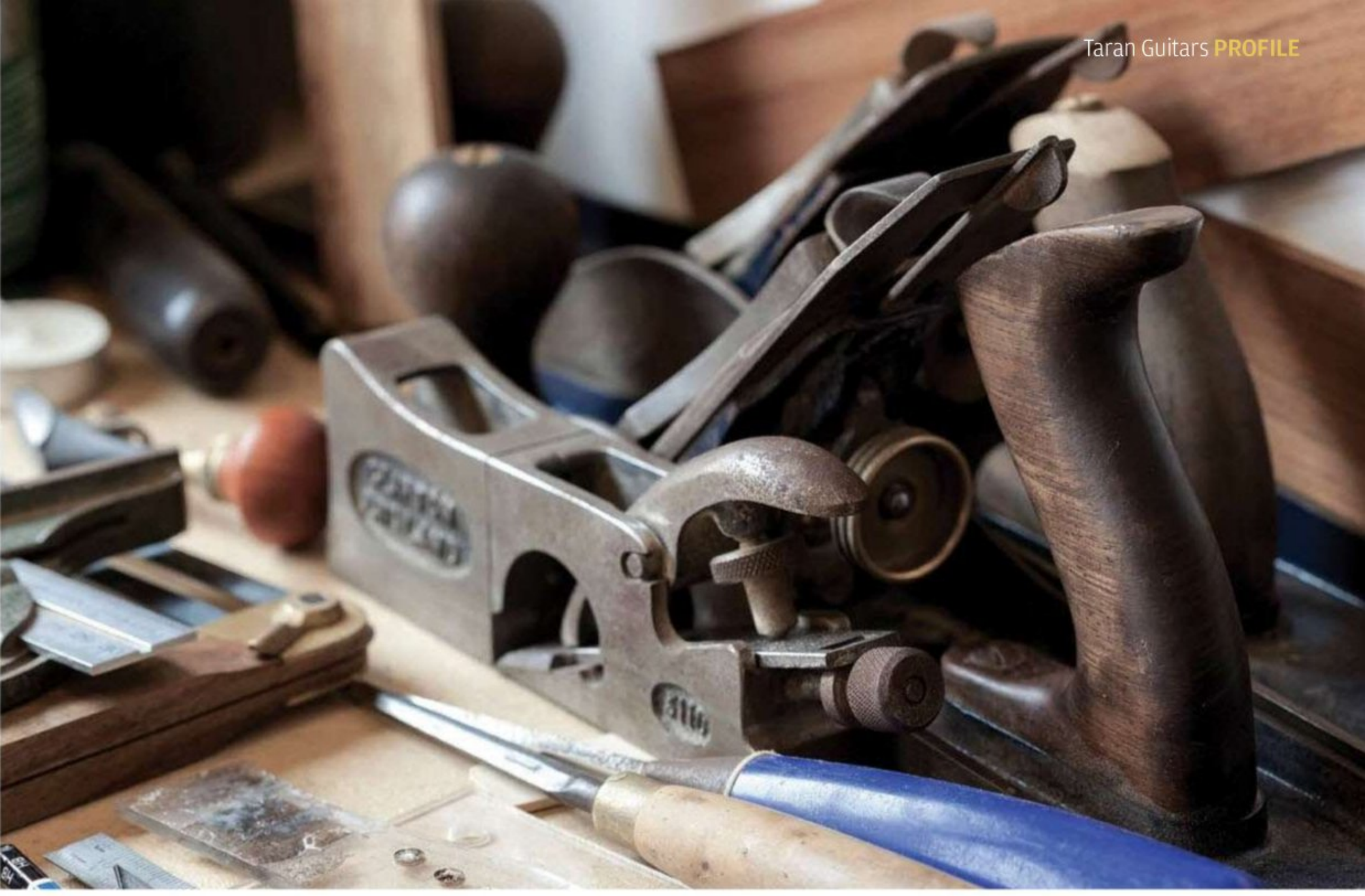
teenager's skills, as well as his pockets, ran deep. A student of the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music in Plockton, his journey to Fife – weighed down by coins – was merely a staging post in his career and the start of a profound friendship between luthier and patron.

Like many of his clients, Dowling forged a strong connection with his youngest customer and catches up with him regularly. This special bond originates from the extended consultation process that Dowling undertakes before building each of the 12 guitars he makes every year. It is a painstaking process of constant refinement and fine tuning that has earned him a 14-month waiting list for his special brand of musical consultancy and retail therapy.

"Very often the guitar we discuss originally," he explains, "is completely different to the one they receive because the client has a much greater understanding of what they want as they progress through the process, and I have also had a chance to listen to them play. They often come back two or three times during the year, so the instrument they ultimately get is completely bespoke."

This collaborative approach produces exceptional guitars with integrity built in. Each one is custom-built but they are all modest in their appearance and rich in their tone. As you reach for one, before your fingers touch the strings, you are aware of the deep bass notes that will soon waft around the pure, clean upper registers. Dowling's guitars have a discernible presence just sitting on your lap.

To produce this understated elegance, Dowling works in partnership with his clients. But as he suggests, an important part of the process is watching them play. It's a skill he has honed over the years and is just as important as any



Above **Old-school charm – Rory's workshop is full of gadgets, old and new**

he employs at his workbench. "I work on response levels, so if you're a very light player, I can make the guitar respond really well to your light touch," he explains. "Equally, if you are a heavy player, I can make it respond to your heavy touch and have more headroom, which means you can thrash it and it won't break up."

He continues: "It's about understanding how much wood to leave on the soundboard, and also the recipe for the back and side materials. One of the most important things is the curvature of the soundboard. You can do nothing else to an instrument bar changing the curvature of the soundboard and you'll still be able to change its dynamics infinitely."

Without drawing breath, he explains that a flatter soundboard creates a guitar that is easier to play because, relatively speaking, it is under less tension, which helps the strings vibrate. A more curved and therefore stressed soundboard, on the other hand, delivers more separation between the notes – which is useful for finger and flat-picking styles.

"It's complicated and I realise its complicated," he says. "I generally don't talk to people about curvatures. I talk about response levels, so that if one of my customers picks up an instrument and it feels a bit tight for them or a bit loose, then I get an idea of how I need to build their instrument. A lot of people don't know I do this, because trying to explain it is really quite difficult, but it makes perfect sense in my mind." >

THE TARAN RANGE

1 **MEILEIN** A parlour-sized guitar, ideal for fingerstyle with a balanced crisp, clear tone.

2 **TARAN MHOR** An OM-sized guitar suited for both fingerstyle and plectrum playing, its sound is described as "energetic and responsive with a warm, deep and clear tone".

3 **TIRGA MHOR** The jumbo of the range with rhythm in its soul. It has a well-balanced, powerful and clear tone.

4 **TIRGA BEAG** Larger than the OM size in width but not in length and depth, the Tirga Beag is Dowling's most popular instrument to date.

5 **ULLADALE** The largest guitar in the family, the Ulladale has been especially designed for open tunings with a warm dynamic tone.

Above (left to right) **Some 'works in progress'; Rory's workshop; his first instrument**

Dowling's attention to detail, while bordering on the obsessive, is nevertheless key to making Taran Guitars stand out (he French polishes the inside of his instruments because it stabilises the wood and it looks good). It's a formula he has refined over 13 years following a fateful sortie into furniture design that resulted in a first class BA (Hons) degree and healthy loathing of the trade. "If I am honest, I never enjoyed making furniture because the bits of wood were too big," he says plainly. "It was just carting about massive bits of wood. I hated it."

His life was transformed when his cousin gave him the Jerry Garcia and David Grisman album *Shady Grove*, with the title song becoming the soundtrack for his rebirth as a luthier. "I became so obsessed with it that I wanted to make an instrument that I could play the track on. So I built an octave mandola. What can I say? I like making things. I thought it was the best thing since sliced bread, until I showed it to somebody who really knew about instruments."

The fledgling mandola and Dowling's first guitar projects were built from instructional books in his bedroom in Edinburgh, and were crude by comparison to his refined work today. His first guitar, which he named Lurch, was "totally overbuilt, had the bridge in the wrong place, neck like a baseball bat and was badly finished," according to its creator.

However, it didn't take long for Dowling to find his feet. By his third attempt, things began to click and the Taran brand, with its recognisable 't.' headstock logo, was born. "I sold my third guitar for £700, which I thought was bloody good for a first sale," he remembers. "Once I had sold the first one, I was already building the next ones, and it was at that point I got a workshop in Edinburgh – that was it."

Dowling moved to a converted milking shed in Fife nearly four years ago. Since then, his business has gone from strength to strength with the likes of Martin Simpson, Matheu Watson and Kenny Anderson (aka King Creosote) calling on the 32-year-old for his deft touch with wood and strings.

As if to underline his success, Dowling recently completed the five-fold expansion of his workshop, which means the inauspicious shed now opens up into a light >

TARAN'S TRICK

You get the sense that being self-trained, Dowling doesn't recognise the same boundaries by which protégé luthiers might be limited. For instance, his latest innovation takes the recognised practice of creating double sides by gluing two pieces of sycamore together in the same curve to create a platform for the soundboard and back, and turbo charges it with an ingenious addition. "When you laminate two things together you get a really strong bond, but when you introduce a core, by way of a Nomex honeycomb composite, the rigidity is hugely increased," says Dowling. "The thing is, it's light. I am calling it triple sides. The idea is you create a ridiculously stiff rim for the instrument so you get all the benefits of a double side, which means you can make the soundboard thinner in areas because it's not having to do so much work because the sides are taking the tension, but you're not changing the mass. The rigidity has been increased massively, so therefore I can make the top more responsive. It's basically double sides on heat."

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A place for everything, everything in its place...

Rory's tasteful designs are built around his clients

and airy space full of industrial sanders and saws, each connected to a dedicated extraction fan. More interestingly, the place has been designed so the work benches can be stored away, creating a pop-up music venue. The inaugural Wood Shop gig saw Antipodean duo The James Brothers play their only Scottish date during a 2015 tour.

But all this expansion and diversification doesn't mean Dowling will be adding to his workforce any time soon. "I think about that a lot, especially on a Monday at 2pm when I realise how much work I have to do for the week ahead," he says. "The thing about taking somebody on is my clients come to me because they want me to build their guitar. If I took someone on, I would have to train them to the same level as myself. While that is feasible – there are a lot of fantastic woodworkers out there – you're not teaching somebody woodworking, you're teaching somebody an understanding of wood, and that takes time."

In fact, Dowling's ambitions remain remarkably modest. "I would really like to continue what I am doing," he says simply. "I'll never be a Bob Taylor or Bill Collings, or produce hundreds of guitars a year. For me, it's just about working with folk and enjoying it. I don't want to saturate the experience for the clients, and by getting bigger I think you have to sacrifice something – and that's what would go. You would lose the experience."

At the far end of the Wood Shop venue, where the stage is lit up at night, Dowling has a consultation room in which he meets his clients during the day to discuss tone woods and listen to them play. Complete with coffee-table photography books, wood-burning stove and a comfortable sofa, this is a place far removed from the noise of the workshop. As Dowling suggests, it is a place of sanctuary.

"This room is important," he says. "It's a space where I can communicate freely with my clients and not be in a dusty workshop where they feel like they're taking up my time because they're in my workspace. This is a really important area in which people can relax and play. If you were ordering a guitar and wanted to come in and play it for 10 hours, you would be more than welcome."

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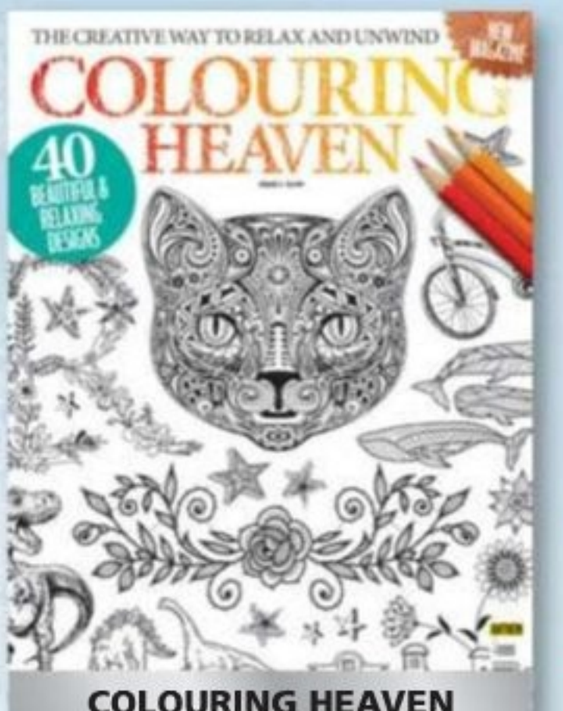

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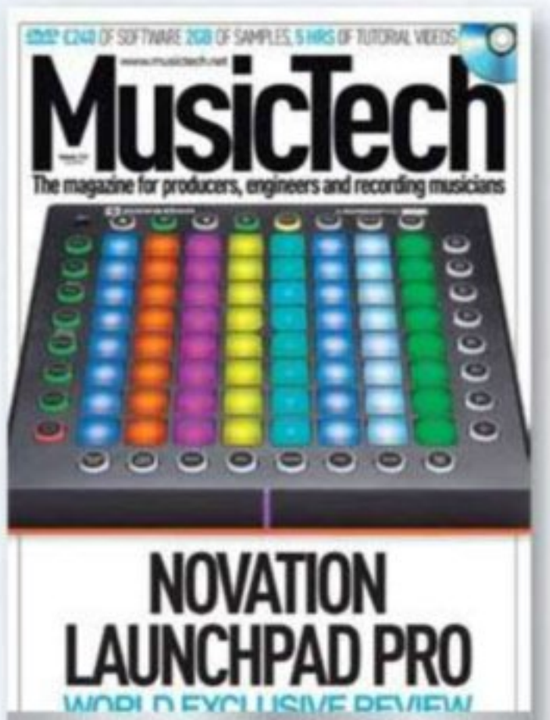

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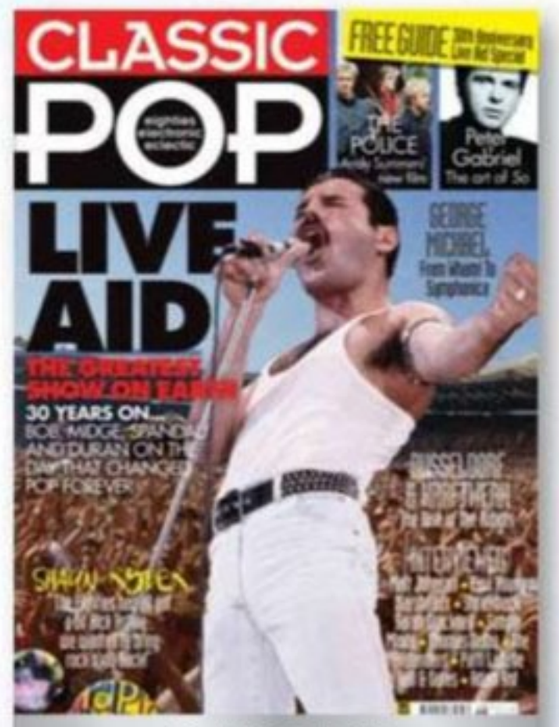

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VIGIER EXCALIBUR ULTRA AP £2,439
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Vigier Excalibur Ultra AP

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

This little black number is Vigier's first foray into active/passive switchability – will it be a morale booster for **RICHARD PURVIS**?

The last time an Englishman was granted possession of Excalibur, he broke it in a fight and tossed it into the nearest lake – getting it back in one piece only thanks to the skill and kindness of a passing underwater repairwoman. Amazing bit of luck, really; we've promised to be more careful with this one...

Like all Vigiers, the limited-edition Excalibur Ultra AP is a lovingly crafted weapon that comes with a suitably kingly price tag. Based in Grigny, a few miles south of Paris, the company founded by Patrice Vigier has been in business since 1980, and its guitars have been endorsed by players ranging from Walter Trout to Wes Borland. You may have come across the Surfreter models, marked out by their fretless metal fingerboards and used to stunning effect by Guthrie Govan.

More recently, you may have come across the GV Rock we reviewed in the November issue. The GV series is a step in the direction of the Les Paul for Vigier, but this Excalibur is more in line with the S-type style with which the marque made its, er, mark. So, what's so special about this model? Well, the 'A' and 'P' stand for active and passive – and that's not something we've seen from Vigier before. The active circuit, accessed via a toggle switch next to the volume control, was designed by Patrice himself for ultimate transparency, and it should get more than 1,000 hours' use out of a decent-quality battery.

Cleverly, a little hole in the rear cavity plate means you can adjust the level of that active boost on the fly, as long as you have a dinky enough screwdriver (take the plate off and you can do it more easily with your fingers). The pickups are German-made Ambers, a pair of humbuckers with a single coil in the middle, selected in classic Strat style with a five-way switch. There's no scratchplate – emphasising the sleek, streamlined form of the guitar – and the only other controls are master volume and tone.

The limited-edition Excalibur Ultra AP is a lovingly crafted weapon that comes with a suitably kingly price tag

Vigier has deigned to carve out a rear chamfer for your shameful British beer gut, but the front is completely flat, as it really has to be to accommodate the scraped 'binding' effect that runs around its edge. This is done just as meticulously as it was on the GV Rock, and the strip of unpainted alder looks much more striking against this rich gloss black finish than it did against the other guitar's matt red. The neck heel is a standard squared-off shape, but the lower cutaway is deep enough to allow trouble-free access to all 24 frets. The neck itself is a single piece of maple reinforced with Vigier's 10/90 system: a carbon fibre bar running through its centre that means it will never warp, or require adjusting for different string gauges. The frets – actually there are 25 if you include the zero – are moderately chubby, and the fingerboard has a modern 12-inch radius for shred- >

A teflon nut and Schaller locking tuners maintain the feeling of quality

KEY FEATURES

Vigier Excalibur Ultra AP

- **PRICE** £2,439 (including hardcase)
- **DESCRIPTION** Double-cutaway solidbody electric, made in France, limited edition
- **BUILD** Alder body; one-piece maple bolt-on neck with 24 frets; Vigier vibrato bridge, Schaller locking tuners
- **CONTROLS** Vigier fixed bridge and tailpiece, Schaller locking tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Amber pickups, HSH, with five-way switch, master volume/tone controls and active/passive switch; active boost level control on control cavity cover
- **SCALE LENGTH** 650mm/25.6"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19.5mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3kg/6.6lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Black only
- **CONTACT** High Tech Distribution 01722 410002 **www.htd-uk.com**

VIGIER EXCALIBUR ULTRA AP £2,439

ELECTRIC GUITAR

Thanks to Vigier's two-point bridge with robust roller saddles, the vibrato works brilliantly

Flicking from passive to active mode produces a huge lift in output

The maple neck is reinforced by a carbon fibre bar running through it

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Dean Michael Angelo Batio MAB1**, **£1,299**, is a 24-fret shredding machine with Floyd Rose bridge and EMG pickups in the same HSH configuration as the Vigier. **Charvel** has its maple-topped signature model for British virtuoso **Guthrie Govan**, from **£3,009**, while **Ibanez** makes a whole host of HSH models with passive pickups.

friendly playability. The bridge is a two-point vibrato type of Vigier's own design, complete with solid-looking roller saddles; at the other end, we find locking tuners and a teflon nut to guide the strings gently over that zero fret.

In use

Fortunately, this Excalibur doesn't come embedded in a massive stone, just a Vigier-branded Hiscox hardcase. The whammy bar screws in simply, a cable goes into the stylishly angled output jack and we're away. First impressions of the acoustic tone while the amp warms up are good, though it is worth pointing out that two humbuckers plus a single coil do take up quite a lot of space – if your sloppy strumming has ever struggled to find a pick-sized gap between the three 'buckers of an SG Deluxe, you may find this only slightly less challenging.

Beginning in passive mode, the bridge pickup is a smooth-sounding unit with just enough cut for sophisticated clean tones – there isn't a lot of spanky character, but you wouldn't call it lifeless either. Moving to the single-coil pup thins the tone down a little, but really not as much as you might think; it's still a bit of a smoothie but now with a touch of cluck, like an extremely refined Strat.

The neck humbucker is a good match for the one at the bridge, with a naturally jazzy feel and no danger of falling into woolliness. There are no surprises in the 'between' settings: middle and bridge is quite phasey, if not as downright quacky as a standard Stratocaster, while middle and neck is extremely sweet but bears no evidence of a visit to the duck pond at all. Decent results all round for the clean stuff, then – now let's turn up the gain and frighten some grannies.

The neck humbucker is a good match for the one at the bridge, with a jazzy feel and no danger of falling into woolliness

This is a rock guitar at heart, and all five settings respond beautifully to overdrive – especially the bridge humbucker, which can sound absolutely massive even without the active boost. When we do flick that little switch, the difference in output level is insane. Vigier doesn't give a decibel figure for what's being added here, but if the trim pot is set to full blast it will go smacking into your amp's front end like a startled horse.

It is monstrous and yet every bit as transparent as Vigier claims, with no obvious colouring anywhere on the EQ spectrum and no complaints about the guitar's character being squished out. The only pity is that when you do go back to passive mode it sounds like a distant banjo in comparison. In most circumstances, a sensible move would be to set the boost somewhere below halfway, maybe as low as a quarter: enough to turn mild crunch into full-on distortion, but not enough to make house engineers hate you.

Wherever you choose to set it, this is a fine feature that turns the Excalibur Ultra AP into a blistering lead machine with great sustain and articulation on all pickup settings. And the vibrato works great, too, pulling up a little over one tone and down all the way to the underworld, then returning to pitch with reliable accuracy, no matter how wildly you batter it.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Superbly well made and a joy to play
+ 10 different sounds, all of them good
+ Well-behaved whammy bridge

– £2,439 for this guitar represents a pretty hefty price tag
– Some may find the design a little dated

The hugely powerful and controllable active boost makes this more than just a beautifully made S-type guitar

9/10

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FELINE LION CUB £2,200
ELECTRIC GUITAR

Feline Lion Cub

The Lion Cub is a deceptively simple guitar, with a set-neck, all-mahogany construction. **HUW PRICE** finds it's all in the fine details

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Jonathan Law set up Feline Guitars in 1997 as a Surrey-based guitar repair business that also produces high-end custom-built electrics. The Lion Cub is one such guitar, with an understated design that belies its quality construction and sounds.

Individual string saddles combine with an Earvana nut for the ultimate in intonation accuracy and a set of smooth Sperzel tuners keeps things stable. A Bare Knuckle Mississippi Queen is chosen because it's a P-90 in PAF clothing. So you get vintage Junior-style tone, but there's the option of installing a humbucker, Filter'Tron or whatever else takes your fancy in the future.

Under the metal shield plate are two Bare Knuckle 550K control potentiometers for extra brightness. A BK-branded Jensen paper/oil tone capacitor is wired 50s-style and the value is 0.015uF rather than the usual 0.022uF.

At 1.5 inches deep, the body is fairly slim. The neck is slim, too, and a heel chamfer eases upper-fret access. The gloss polyester finish is applied well and the build quality can't really be faulted.

In use

I've rarely played a well-set-up all-mahogany electric guitar with a set neck that didn't sound lively, harmonically complex and resonant when unplugged. Throw in a wrapover tailpiece and it's a simple formula that seems almost foolproof. The Lion Cub is exactly that sort of guitar. Some guitars of this type fall into the 'one pickup one sound' category. It's fine if that sound is one you like and suits your needs. But those who have experienced the thrills of a vintage Les Paul or SG Junior will know they can be very versatile. Fortunately, the Lion Cub follows the vintage Gibson tone trail. Versatility is dependant on two things. Firstly, the pickup and volume control need to interact in a way that allows you to back off the volume while retaining clarity. Secondly, the tone control must have a usable taper, preferably connected to the output of the volume control.

There's so much woody tone on offer that, wherever you set the controls, the Lion Cub always sounds good

The Lion Cub ticks all these boxes and the Mississippi Queen is a peach of a pickup. It's microphonic, so every ounce of detail comes through and the pick definition is outstanding. With everything fully up, the Lion Cub produces a roaring chime laden with harmonic overtones. When you roll back the tone the darker grind of the midrange becomes more apparent and the sound gets closer to a nice humbucker. You could even use the rolled-back tone for your rhythm sound and add cut for soloing by turning the tone up to 11 (yes, 11) – maintaining consistent volume and amp-driving power. Conversely, rolling the treble completely off produces an absolutely convincing 'woman' tone.

There's no treble bleed capacitor, but no clarity is lost when you turn down volume. With treble fully up, you can get jangle and even funk or country licks. Reducing the treble sweetens the sound without making things muffled and there's so much woody tone on offer that, wherever you set the controls, the Lion Cub always sounds good.

I love the Lion Cub, although I could gripe about the nut's sharp corners and the cream pickup surround. I'd prefer a chunkier neck with smaller frets, but those features can be specified.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Surprisingly versatile
+ Controls work exceptionally well
+ Fabulous tone
+ Impressive build quality

– Corners of nut are sharp
– Some may prefer the dogear look

Much like a Junior with the rough edges smoothed over but the character intact, Feline's attention to small details lifts the Lion Cub's playability, versatility and tone to a very high level

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Feline Lion Cub

- **PRICE** £2,200
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar, manufactured in the UK
- **BUILD** Two-piece mahogany body with three-piece set mahogany neck, 12" radius rosewood fingerboard, Earvana nut and 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** Tonepros wrapover tailpiece, Sperzel tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Bare Knuckle 550K volume and tone controls, Bare Knuckle Mississippi Queen pickup
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 18.5mm at first fret, 21mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 6.8lbs/3.1kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISHES** Polyester – you choose the colour
- **CONTACT** Feline Guitars 0208 680 9131 **www.felineguitars.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... A singlecut **Gibson Les Paul Junior £499** is the most obvious alternative, but you'll have to install your own intonateable bridge. For **£1,750 Dave Dearnaley** will build you a custom instrument with a vintage-correct eye for detail.

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MARTY DODSON WAS AN ASPIRING SONGWRITER. ONE DAY, HE DECIDED TO HAMMER A NAIL INTO A WALL. "THIS IS WHERE I WILL HANG MY FIRST GOLD RECORD," HE DECLARED—WHICH WAS A BOLD PROCLAMATION, ESPECIALLY COMING FROM A GUY WHOSE NEXT BEST OPTION WAS A JOB WRITING TOASTER MANUALS. FOR SIX LONG YEARS HE WALKED BY THAT EMPTY NAIL. AND SO DID HIS WIFE AND THREE KIDS. THIS TOOK GUTS. PARTICULARLY AFTER EATING MASHED POTATOES COVERED IN 69-CENT GRAVY. BUT MARTY PERSEVERED. FOCUSED ON SUCCESS. UNTIL ONE DAY, A GOLD RECORD HUNG ON THAT NAIL, AND THEN A PLATINUM NEXT TO IT. HIS STORY REMINDS US THAT THE WORLD COULD USE MORE DREAMERS LIKE MARTY. FOR MORE ON MARTY AND OTHER STORIES OF COURAGE THAT INSPIRE US, *visit taylorguitars.com*

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VOX AC10 C1 £430
AMPLIFIER

Vox AC10 C1

The AC10 is arguably the least appreciated of the classic Vox amps, but it's back as the AC10 C1. **HUW PRICE** checks it out

Starting in 1959, the AC10 was shipped in various forms. The early 'TV front' cabinets gave way to the more familiar Vox-style designs in 1961 and beige turned to black in 1963. The AC10 started out life with a single 10-inch ELAC or Goodmans speaker and from 1962 onwards an AC10 Twin with two 10-inch speakers was available as well.

Electronically, it was a bit of an oddball because Vox used some unusual valves. The EF86 pentode had been employed in all of the earliest Vox amps; it was notoriously microphonic and Vox had stopped using them in its more powerful amps.

Even so, it was deemed adequate for the AC10. Stranger still was the ECF82, which combined a triode and a pentode in one glass envelope. This valve handled both preamp and tremolo functions. In common with the Marshall 18W and the Watkins Dominator, the AC10 had an EZ81 rectifier, two cathode biased EL84 power valves, plus a 'vibrato' (tremolo) channel. The amp was constructed in Vox's usual manner with components mounted on tag board, and equalisation was confined to a single tone control.

Besides establishing the pedigree of the AC10, I'm detailing all of this to demonstrate that the only important features the AC10 C1 shares with its forebears are the EL84s, the 10-watt power rating and the name.

Built in China, this amp is more of a re-imagining than a reissue. The C1 version has a single channel with bass and treble controls that are based on Vox's top boost circuit. The tremolo is omitted but you get reverb instead. The originals were non-master volume amps, but the C1 has gain and master volume controls.

The components are assembled on printed circuit boards with the valve sockets and control potentiometers mounted on the boards rather than the chassis.

The only important features the C1 shares with its forebears are the EL84s, the 10-watt power rating and the name

The C1 cabinet is smaller than both versions of the AC10 combo. It's more or less a closed-back cabinet, with just a small vent at the base of the rear panel. Inside, there's a single 10-inch Celestion VX10 speaker, along with a jack to run an external 16-Ohm speaker cabinet. Connecting to an external speaker disengages the internal one.

Other vintage features include the 'basket weave' tolex, gold piping, 'brown diamond' speaker cloth and plastic carry handle. The black control plate and cream chickenhead knobs add a contemporary twist and the package weighs just 12.3Kg.

The AC10 C1 is also the first valve amp I've seen with an automatic power-off function. It's installed to comply with European regulation and will power down the amp if two hours pass with no audio signal detected. >

The C1 has one channel, with a reverb control replacing the original AC10's tremolo

KEY FEATURES

Vox AC10 C1

- **PRICE** £430
- **DESCRIPTION** One-channel valve combo, made in China
- **POWER RATING** 10W
- **VALVES** 2x 12AX7s, 2x EL84s
- **FRONT PANEL** Input jack, gain, bass, treble, reverb, volume, on/off switch
- **REAR PANEL** External speaker output (16-Ohm only), ECO on/off switch,
- **SPEAKER** Celestion VX10
- **DIMENSIONS** 520x210x410mm
- **WEIGHT** 12.3kg/27.12lbs
- **CONTACT** Korg UK 01908 304600 **www.voxamps.com**

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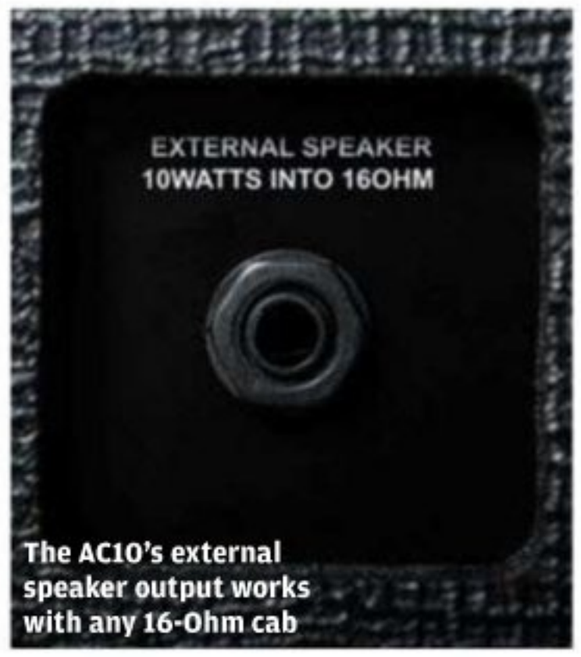
VOX AC10 C1 £430
AMPLIFIER

It might not look much like a vintage AC10 on the inside, but it sounds the part



The AC10's external speaker output works with any 16-Ohm cab

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The **Fender Pro Junior £419** shares the same valve complement as the C1, but the controls are restricted to volume and tone. The **Laney VC15-110 £390** is rated at 15 watts and has reverb as well as an effects loop. But for the maximum in features, the **Fender Super Champ X2 £316** is well worth checking out.

In use
Cathode biased Vox amps are known to run hot, but fear not. Standing over the amp and playing a powerchord, I felt a blast of air from the top vent hit me full in the face. So there's plenty of air moving around inside the cabinet to keep things cool.

The C1's tone controls respond and interact in a peculiar and slightly unpredictable way that's not dissimilar to the old Vox top boost arrangement. Bass response seems to be fairly neutral about halfway up, so you can roll it off or boost it. Turning up the treble control increases high-frequency response much as you might expect, but beyond the halfway point the bass begins to roll off as treble is increased.

There also appears to be some degree of crossover between the controls, which changes the timbre of the midrange. So some familiarisation is required before you can start to get the hang of the tone controls, which means dialling in a sound can take a bit longer than you'd usually expect. It also means there is a greater range of tones than you might normally get from a regular two-band equaliser.

It was fortunate to have an original '63 AC10 on hand to compare with the C1. Better still, the vintage example was retrofitted with a top boost module and the input resistors had been changed to AC15 spec to make it louder and brighter. Despite all the construction changes between the C1 and the vintage AC10, the tonal similarities were more apparent than the differences.

With the reverb turned off, the C1 can sound very much like a vintage AC10's normal channel. Compared to the old one, the treble isn't quite as sweet, but the C1's bass response is considerably tighter and better defined. The most impressive thing is the way the C1 captures the harmonically loaded and slightly blurry chime that characterises the classic Vox sound.

If you prefer a bit more vintage looseness in the lows, the C1 can oblige when you ramp up the bass control. The point is it's something you can dial in to taste rather than something you're obliged to live with. So we can say that the C1 does sound a lot like an original – but only up to a point.

In sheer gain terms, the C1 matches the old AC10 – then pushes things a lot further still. The C1 can get very overdriven, but the bass end holds together extremely well, and even with single coils the treble remains devoid of harshness. The C1 also cleans up really well when you back off your guitar volume, and the master volume does a fantastic job of reining back this surprisingly loud little combo to bedroom levels.

We compared the VX10 speaker with a Celestion Alnico Gold and a G10M. The C1 in combination with the Gold delivered all the old-school Vox jangle you could want and the G10M was smoother in the highs and fuller in the mids. The VX10 was voiced somewhere between the two and the C1's cabinet provides more thump and bass extension than the open-back design.

On balance, reverb will probably be more useful than tremolo in a plug and play amp such as the C1, and it sounds pretty decent. The C1 may be an AC10 in name only, but it undeniably looks and sounds like a Vox. For Brit-flavoured chewy mids, jangly treble and classic valve grind at an affordable price, you couldn't ask for much more.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Genuinely Vox-like tone
+ Wide gain range
+ Sweet-sounding reverb
+ Classic looks
+ Easily replaced valves
+ Very effective master volume

– No tremolo
– Lacks the character of an old AC10
– Limited clean headroom
– External speaker jack mutes internal speaker

An all-valve combo that delivers fine-quality classic British tones at bedroom, studio and small gig levels

8/10

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Peavey Classic 20MH & ValveKing 20MH

Peavey has joined the lunchbox frenzy with mini versions of some of its best-known heads. **RICHARD PURVIS** tries two for size

Some people are so whiny. They complain about the bad weather, they complain about their trains being late, they complain about the price of smoked haddock and they complain about having to lift a 30kg amplifier in and out of their car boot every week for band practice. It's as if aching arms, chronic back pain and the occasional broken toe are in some way an inconveniene...

Luckily, amp makers have heard their anguished groans. Following a trail first opened up by the Orange Tiny Terror, there's now a flourishing market in 'lunchbox' heads – many of them driven by a pair of EL84s to deliver a giggable 15-20 watts of genuine all-valve tone into whatever size of cabinet you can still be bothered to carry.

Rather than designing a whole new amp, Peavey's approach has been to create 'miniaturised' models within three of its existing ranges: the vintage-styled Classic, the more modern-featured ValveKing and the none-more-metal 6505. On test here are the 20-watt 'MH' (mini head) versions of those first two: each using three ECC83s and two EL84s, and each offering two channels plus a switchable gain boost and digital reverb.

Other useful features shared by both amps include a switch for attenuation down to five watts or one watt, mic-simulated XLR and USB outputs for DI, a headphone output, an effects loop and tube status indicator LEDs for making sure the output valves are running OK.

Both come with a two-way footswitch, but where will you plug it in? There's one input for bypassing the reverb and/or the effects loop, and another for switching channels and/or engaging the boost. If you want to control all four you'll need a second footswitch – watch out for all those cables.

In case the name isn't enough of a giveaway, Peavey's Classic amps are dressed in tweed jackets that represent a nod to the vibe of the first Fender amps

Classic 20MH

In case the name isn't enough of a giveaway for you, Peavey's Classic amps are dressed in smart tweed jackets that represent a clear nod to the gutsy, all-American vibe of the first Fender amps. They even have the same mirror-like control panel with black chickenhead knobs and white lettering that, in the case of the 20MH at least, will prove almost impossible to read in low-light situations.

The most important features, once you manage to make them out, are a three-band tonestack and three volume controls: preamp for the clean channel, pre and post for the overdrive. There's a push-button for channel switching but, curiously, not for engaging the boost – that appears to be footswitch only.

In use

This is a loud 20 watts. Single coils stay clean up to 6 or 7 on the first >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Orange Tiny Terror** is the godfather of all lunchbox amps and it's still available for **£365**, while the **Egnater Rebel 20 MkII** offers some very impressive functionality for around **£450**. Scale your budget up dramatically and the **Mesa/Boogie Mini Rectifier 25** comes into play at **£1,236**.

channel's volume control and it's a big, fat, ringing tone. The EQ controls do nothing particularly dramatic, but they are useful in a thoroughly musical way - you can crank them right up or right down and they will change things, but without destroying the core of the tone. The crunch comes in gradually as you get towards the top of the volume dial and you can get some pretty huge rhythm tones here, with nice natural compression.

Plug in the footswitch and that 'hidden' boost works fine at giving everything a slight lift in level, but for full-on overdrive you'll need to switch channels. At this point, we urge you to be slightly reckless and start with the 'post' control at full blast; you may well decide to keep it there. It's basically a not-very-nice master volume control, and doesn't need to be turned down very far in order to drain all the meaty juice out of the Classic 20MH's distorted voice - changing down to five watts will actually do less damage to the tone. What you do get with everything opened up is a solid mid-gain rock sound with plenty of bark, though noticeably less low-end warmth than through the clean channel.

While we're on the subject of warmth, the reverb has clearly been treated with some sort of modulation effect to add some; at high settings you can hear it pulsing away like a chorus pedal, and it's not an especially likeable sound. What's more, when using the footswitch, we found there was a very slight trace of 'verb left in the signal when bypassed. Some issues, then - but nothing that stops it from being basically a very nice amp.

ValveKing 20MH

Now we're dealing with white italic letters and white chickenheads on a black panel - a distinctly non-classic look that may have many blues fans spitting out their moonshine in horror, but at least it's readable.

The connections on the ValveKing's back panel are identical to those on the Classic 20MH. However, modernity means more control over gain structure, and that's what we get on the front. As well as an overall master volume control, there are preamp gain knobs for both channels and, in the same spot where the Classic has only one push-button there are two - so this time you can engage the boost without a footswitch. There's also a control labelled Vari-Class, for moving the output valves out of standard Class A/B operation towards something more like Class A - which is less efficient, but it doesn't sound too shoddy in a Vox AC15, does it?

In use

We won't dwell for too long on the clean sound with this one - not because there's anything wrong with it, but because it sounds pretty much the same as the Classic's. Sadly, though, our review amp quickly throws up another minor annoyance: for some reason the push-button for the boost doesn't work on this channel, although the footswitch does. And when we do go over to the dirty side - with either the button or the footswitch - there's a brief but quite audible moment of drop-out before it kicks in. This does not sound good, and we hope that it's a rare fault in our review unit.

The overdriven tones themselves, happily, do sound good - as long as you have a liking for all things aggressive. There's definitely more gain to play with in this amp than in the Classic 20MH, especially if you throw the boost into the mix, and bottoming out the middle control brings a fine scooped metal tone. The Vari-Class control does not alter the whole character of the amp, but it's noticeable that moving towards Class A makes the overdrive a little smoother and fizzier, at the expense of some power and punchiness. It's a canny little feature in an amp that's capable of doing more than just all-out metal sounds.

KEY FEATURES

Classic 20MH

- **PRICE** £595
- **DESCRIPTION** 20W valve head, made in China
- **FRONT PANEL** Guitar input, clean channel volume, channel switch, dirty channel pre and post volumes, bass, middle, treble reverb, output tube status LEDs, standby and power switches
- **REAR PANEL** 20w/5w/1w output switch, speaker output with 16/8-Ohm impedance switch; headphone and DI outputs with speaker defeat and earth lift buttons; FX loop send and return, channel/boost and reverb/loop footswitch inputs; USB output
- **DIMENSIONS** 360x190x200mm
- **WEIGHT** 7.6kg/16.8lbs
- **CONTACT** Barnes & Mullins
  bandm.co.uk
  peavey.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Solid clean sounds
+ Nicely judged EQ controls
+ USB recording output is surprisingly realistic

– Post volume needs to be high for good overdrive tones
– Wobbly reverb is no match for a real spring
– Can't access the gain boost without a footswitch

This is a powerful and versatile lunchbox head with some handy modern functionality

7/10

KEY FEATURES

ValveKing 20MH

- **PRICE** £540
- **DESCRIPTION** 20W valve head, made in China
- **FRONT PANEL** Guitar input, clean channel volume, lead channel gain, boost and channel switches, bass, middle, treble and reverb, Vari-Class and master volume, output tube status LEDs, standby and power switches
- **REAR PANEL** 20w/5w/1w output switch, speaker output with 16/8-Ohm impedance switch; headphone and DI outputs with speaker defeat and earth lift buttons; FX loop send and return, channel/boost and reverb/loop footswitch inputs; USB output
- **DIMENSIONS** 360x190x200mm
- **WEIGHT** 6.6kg/14.6lbs
- **CONTACT** Barnes & Mullins
  bandm.co.uk
  peavey.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Everything we like about the Classic 20MH also applies here
+ Smooth and meaty high-gain tones
+ Vari-Class control is subtle but nice to have

– Like the Classic 20MH, it doesn't have the best reverb
– Our review sample had some switching issues

It looks more 'rock' than its tweedy sibling, but the mini ValveKing is not just a metal machine

8/10

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Red Witch pedals

These creative pedals take classic effects genres and pack them with extra control and flexibility. **GARY WALKER** sees Red...

Based on New Zealand's North Island, Red Witch was founded by Ben Fulton with a mission statement of creating unique analogue effects that inspire creativity. Red Witch's pedals cover familiar effects such as delay, overdrive and modulation, souping them up with additional controls and inventive twists. On test here, we have four pedals from the company's Premium range. All have robust enclosures and lifetime electronics warranties. The Famulus packs a versatile twin-overdrive circuit; the Titan goes one better, with three delays; the Empress is a super-sized chorus and vibrato machine and the Moon is a leftfield reimagining of the classic phaser.

KEY FEATURES

Empress Chorus Vibrato

- **PRICE** £189
- **DESCRIPTION** Chorus/vibrato pedal. Made in New Zealand
- **CONTROLS** Mix, depth, voicing, velocity, vibe/chorus switch, bright switch
- **FEATURES** Stereo out, powered by 9V battery or DC adaptor (not supplied), chrome footswitch, true-bypass switching, lifetime electronics warranty, internal slide switch to adjust input stage setting
- **DIMENSIONS** 118mm (w) x 38mm (d) x 94mm (h)
- **CONTACT** 440 Distribution 01132 589599 **www.redwitchpedals.com**

The Empress is a combined chorus and vibrato stompbox used by none other than Andy Summers. In chorus mode, the voice and velocity knobs act like dual speed controls, with voice setting the delay time and velocity the speed of the sweep. The full range of voicing takes you from subtle sparkle to a dizzying noise. With these two variables, plus depth and mix, and the option to switch to vibrato, there are myriad sounds on offer. With the voicing between 7 o'clock and 11 o'clock, the brightness switch comes into play, too, adding a little extra sugar.

We preferred the sounds in the first half of the voice control's range – a sweet chiming chorus effect, rather than the vertiginous wobble past 12 o'clock. The vibrato mode, when used subtly, offers a lovely analogue throb. The Empress' instructions warn you to expect some hiss in the voicing control's most extreme settings. However, we found the control to be generally quite noisy.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Chorus sound is sweet and subtle
+ Vibrato mode is an added bonus
+ Wide range of sounds available

– Voicing control on our model noisy
– More expensive than other choruses

The Empress is a highly versatile pedal, offering everything from subtle shimmer to detuned vibrato

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Titan Triple Delay

- **PRICE** £249
- **DESCRIPTION** Triple delay pedal. Made in New Zealand
- **CONTROLS** Delay, mix, feedback x3, series/parallel toggle switch
- **FEATURES** Effects loop, chrome footswitch, true-bypass switching, powered by 9V battery or DC adaptor (not supplied), lifetime electronics warranty
- **DIMENSIONS** 118mm (w) x 38mm (d) x 94mm (h)

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

A trio of independent delay circuits, offering up to 800 millisecond repeats, each with delay time, mix and feedback controls, make the Titan a seriously interesting proposition. A toggle switch allows you to run the three delays either parallel or in series.

The Titan will appeal immediately to fans of post-rock and ambient soundscaping. The mix and feedback controls take you from syncopated rhythmic repeats to huge rolling feedback textures. Setting different times on the first two delays with the mix and feedback used sparingly, and cranking up those controls on the final delay produces lovely warm repeats for arpeggios and fingerpicking, with the third delay underpinning your playing with a vast wash. The feedback requires careful use, or things slide into boundless self-oscillation – unless that's what you're after of course. Our only concern is the price, pitching the Titan against the likes of Strymon's DIG and the more versatile old faithful Line 6 DL-4.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Lovely warm analogue-style sounds
+ Ability to stack delays for interesting rhythmic patterns and ambient effects

– More fully-featured alternatives out there
– Small controls can be fiddly

A beautiful-sounding analogue delay – you can really get lost in the ambient depths of its trio of circuits

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Deluxe Moon Phaser

- **PRICE** £189
- **DESCRIPTION** Analogue phaser/tremolo pedal. Made in New Zealand
- **CONTROLS** Velocity, trajectory, cosmology
- **FEATURES** chrome footswitch, powered by 9V battery or DC adaptor (not supplied), lifetime electronics warranty, internal slide switch to pad input
- **DIMENSIONS** 118mm (w) x 38mm (d) x 94mm (h)

Again, flexibility is the name of the game here. The Moon isn't strictly a phaser in the traditional sense of the word. Red Witch describes it as phase and tremolo, offering a unique combination of the two called 'tremophase', with a warm analogue tone that it terms 'spatial sparkle'.

We get three control knobs: velocity alters the phase speed and, for us, it's wired counter-intuitvely – turning clockwise decreases the rate. Trajectory controls the part of the frequency the phase will affect – clockwise for shimmering treble and anti-clockwise for the low end. The cosmology rotary switch has six settings – three phasers, two tremophases and a tremolo. On our unit, the switch gave an audible pop when operating. The three phase settings are warm and understated – the Moon won't deliver John Squire's jet plane swoosh from *Made Of Stone* – but the tremophases are really interesting, emulating a Uni-Vibe with the trajectory wound back and delivering a subtle Pink Floyd-style pulse.

Guitar VERDICT

+ A range of phase and tremolo sounds
+ Tremophase settings are inventive
+ Stereo outputs for two-amp phasing

– Our unit had a noisy cosmology knob
– More versatile tremolo pedals available

The Moon delivers many really interesting sounds, but some players may find it to be a jack of both trades and master of neither

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Famulus

- **PRICE** £189
- **DESCRIPTION** Distortion/overdrive pedal with two parallel circuits. Made in New Zealand
- **CONTROLS** Volume, tone, gain A, gain B, alchemy
- **FEATURES** Chrome footswitch, true-bypass switching, powered by 9V battery or DC adaptor (not supplied), lifetime electronics warranty
- **DIMENSIONS** 118mm (w) x 38mm (d) x 94mm (h)

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Two parallel overdrive/distortion circuits are the Famulus' USP. The alchemy knob enables you to dial in how much of each circuit you want, opening up an impressive range of tones, from clean boost to cranked harmonically-rich overdrive.

The twin gain circuits work brilliantly, ensuring you cut through a mix, where other drive pedals squash and go missing. Red Witch says gain B offers more fat midrange than gain A, although we couldn't hear a huge difference between the two, with perhaps a little more low-end punch in gain A and slightly more gritty treble in gain B. The Famulus gets really useful when you set the Alchemy to 12 o'clock, with one gain low and the other cranked up. Giving equal emphasis to each circuit, it results in a rich overdriven bark, but with your playing dynamics clear and defined. It's ideal for classic rock and indie sounds, or stacked with a fuzz or higher-gain distortion. The tone control is wired 'backwards' – as you turn clockwise, things get darker.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Diverse range of overdrive sounds
+ Drive is defined and clear in a band mix

– Doesn't do full-on heavy-rock distortion
– Tone control orientation confusing

A great-sounding pedal that's adaptable to many uses. If you're frustrated by drive pedals that compress and disappear when things get loud, give the Famulus a go

9/10

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Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

Stand Out in the Crowd

System 10 Stompbox Digital Wireless Guitar System

The innovative digital wireless guitar system from Audio-Technica that fits right on your pedal board. Pair up to 8 guitars with separate body pack transmitters for easy on stage changeovers, and either mute, tune or use a second rig with the A-B switching. With a discreet clip bodypack, sturdy metal pedal casing, and no large intrusive aerials, it is ready to go straight from the box to the stage. Operating on the 2.4GHz range, it is also both interference and wireless license free.

www.audio-technica.com

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Six of the best

There's no need to settle for socks and mince pies in your Christmas stocking this year. Put these great guitar gifts on your list instead...

Fender Custom Shop Tool Kit

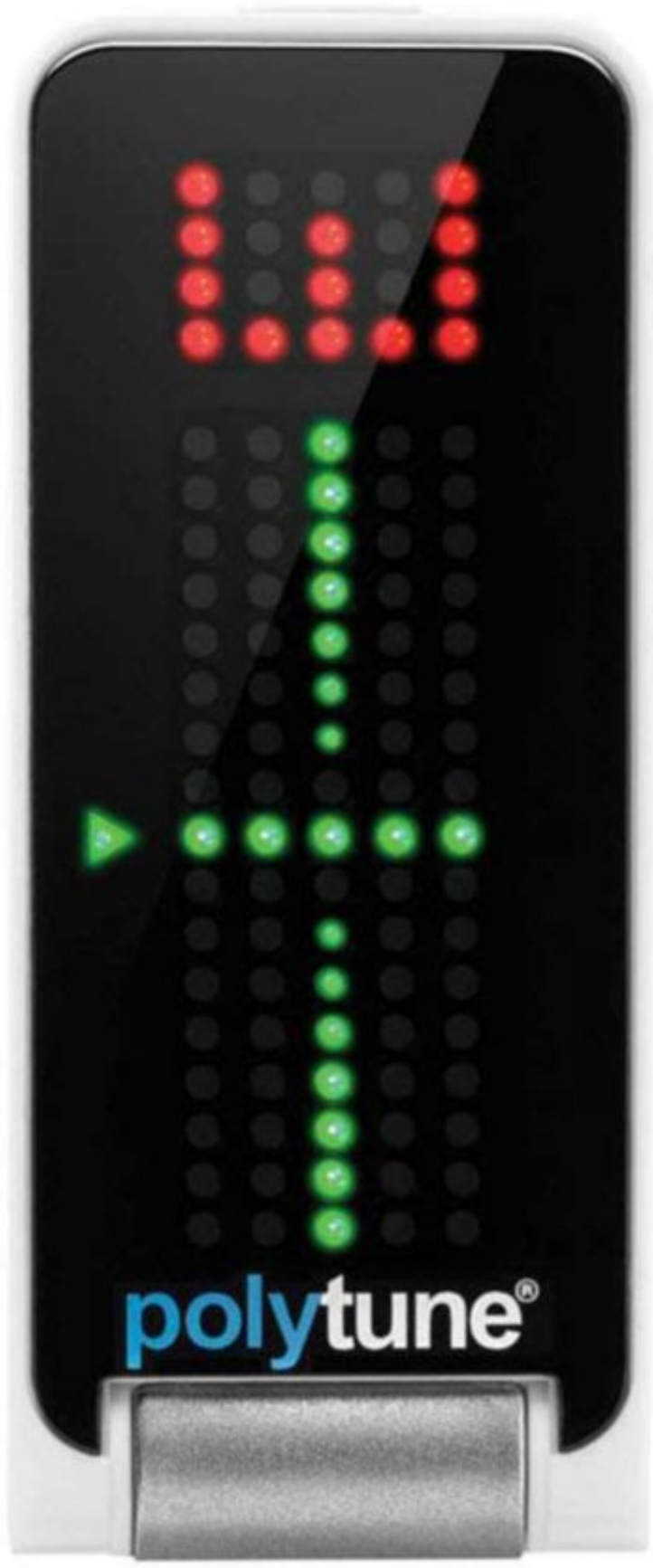
PRICE £49 **CONTACT** www.fender.com

These handy miniature tool kits made by CruzTools come in electric or acoustic versions that will fit in your gigbag and could prove crucial if an emergency strikes when you're playing live. They contain everything a guitarist could need for setting up and adjusting their instrument, including a four-in-one screwdriver, hex wrenches, steel ruler, string winder and cutter and a capo. They come in a tough polyester pouch, too.

TC Electronic PolyTune Clip

PRICE £35 **CONTACT** www.tcelectronic.com

The PolyTune Clip is simply one of the best mini tuners on the market. The smaller, clip-on sibling of the Danish company's PolyTune and PolyTune Mini stompbox tuners, it offers three modes - polyphonic, enabling you to tune all six strings at once, chromatic and strobe. With a tough stainless steel clip, it's designed for use on electric, acoustic or bass guitars and the screen automatically flips in order to be readable at whatever angle you're using it.

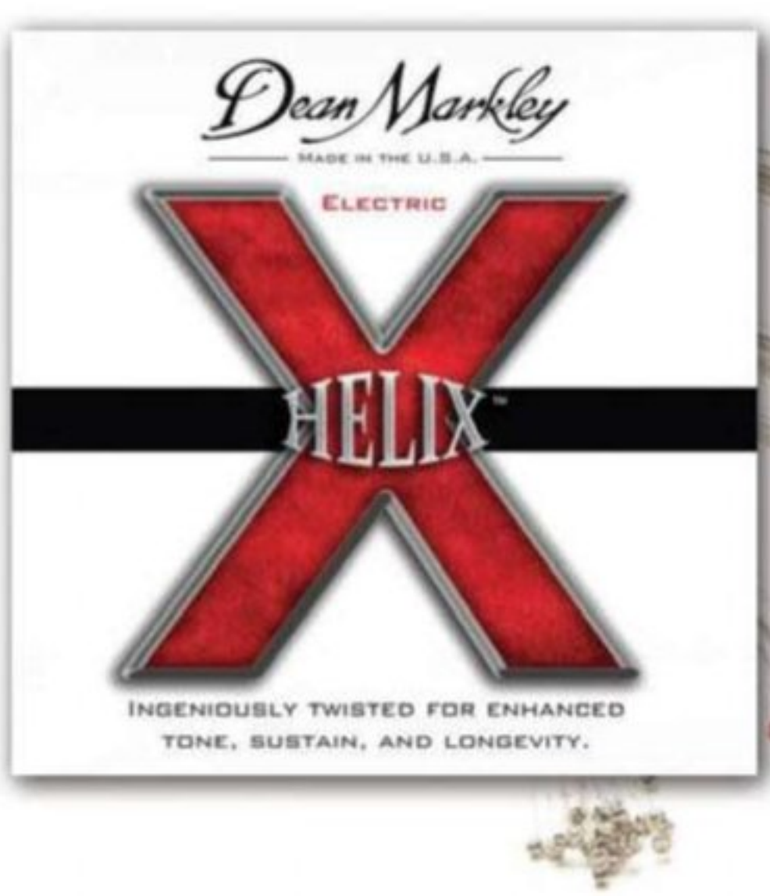


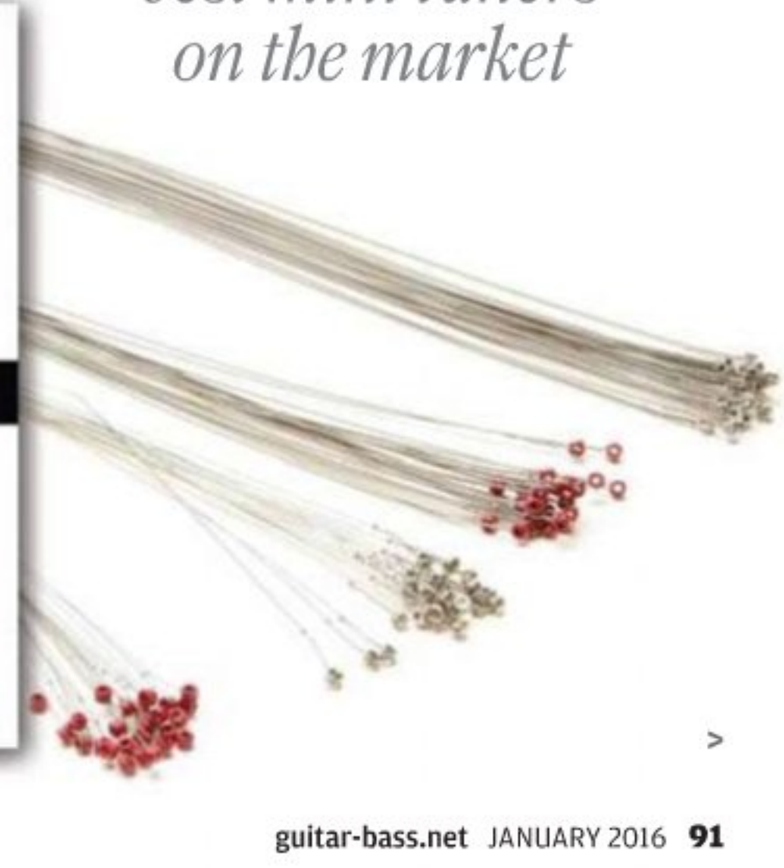
The PolyTune Clip is simply one of the best mini tuners on the market

Dean Markley Helix Strings

PRICE £5 **CONTACT** www.deanmarkley.com

No guitarist can ever have too many packs of strings, and Dean Markley's Helix sets use innovative new technology. The company claims Helix strings last up to six times longer than other brands due to the company's patent-pending elliptical winding process, which it says results in a smoother feel and a richer, more resonant tone. Made of eight per cent nickel-plated steel wrapped over tinned mandolin hex-core, the strings come in gauges 9, 10 and 11.





Overdrive Straps

PRICE Various **CONTACT** www.overdrivestraps.com

Established earlier this year, Overdrive Straps are already being used by the likes of Mastodon's Brent Hinds and Troy Sanders. Each strap is handmade in The Netherlands from high-quality full-grain leather and retro fabrics. They can be made to each guitarist's individual requirements, with a wide range of seatbelt, retro-fabric and leather designs and custom lengths. The company also sells useful 'beer bottle' strap locks to stop your guitar suffering any nasty on-stage accidents and ships worldwide.

The added option of powering the Fly by battery makes it a truly portable tone machine that punches well above its feather-light weight

Blackstar Fly 3

PRICE £49 **CONTACT** www.blackstaramps.com

Blackstar took our breath away when it first released the Fly – a cutting-edge three-watt mini amp that packs the company's Infinite Shape Feature, tape delay effects and two channels into its tiny enclosure, with just a three-inch speaker. It also has an MP3/Line In jack for connecting an MP3 player, phone, tablet or laptop so you can play along with your favourite tracks. The added option of powering the Fly by battery makes it a truly portable tone machine that punches well above its feather-light weight.

Music Nomad Premium Guitar Care System

PRICE £39 **CONTACT** www.musicnomadcare.com

This complete care kit will help you keep your beloved instruments in fine fettle. It comprises an all-in-one cleaner, polish and wax, a second polish for deeper cleaning, fretboard oil to clean and condition your fretboard, and two super-soft microfibre towels. The company also offers the String Fuel cleaner and lubricant to keep your strings free from oils and dirt that build up over playing time. As an added bonus, every purchase of a Music Nomad product contributes money to musical non-profit organisations and the Musicnomad.com online resource for musicians.

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Vintage BENCH TEST

1978 ZEMAITIS

Tony Zemaitis' guitars became iconic thanks to the rockstars of the 1970s. **HUW PRICE** takes an in-depth look at a 1978 example...

It's no wonder so many rock stars ordered guitars from Tony Zemaitis back in the 1970s. These instruments have such show-stopping charisma that you'd need to be a superstar in your own right (or imagination) to avoid being upstaged. Put it this way, this is not the obvious choice for your local blues jam down at the proverbial Dog & Duck.

Meeting Tony Zemaitis sounds like an enjoyable experience. Mickie Owen travelled to Tony's house and was treated to a meal and a glass or two of wine when he ordered this guitar in December 1977. Tony liked to discuss his customers' preferences and gauge the size of their hands so he could carve neck profiles they would find comfortable.

While he was working on the guitar, Ronnie Wood paid Tony a visit. His Zemaitis had been stolen and he asked if he could have Mickie's guitar. To Tony's credit, he told his celebrity customer he would have to wait his turn like everybody else, and by April '78 Mickie's guitar was ready for collection.

Initially, this guitar was supplied with passive electronics and some different humbuckers. Mickie didn't care for their heavy metal tone, so a year later Tony installed a pair of Gibson humbuckers and active electronics. Mickie was pleased with the results and subsequently used the guitar on *Recharged* and *Meltdown* by The Vibrators and Garrie and The Roosters' *Shake It Down*.

Initially, this guitar was supplied with passive electronics and some different humbuckers

Zemaitis guitars are known for their pearl inlays and metal tops. Danny O'Brien engraved the metal tops and this one features Mickie's name alongside the date, plus a galleon and skull and crossbones. >

KEY FEATURES

1978 Zemaitis

- **SCALE LENGTH** 634mm/25"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 19.5mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37.5mm at nut, 47.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.5kg/9.9lbs
- **FINISH** Cherry Gloss
- **CONTACT** Cranes Music 029 2039 8215 **www.cranesmusicstore.com**

The slim but wide D-profile neck with bound ebony fretboard. Tony used to saw through the binding to install the skinny but tall frets

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Danny O'Brien hand engraved each Zemaitis' metal top. This one is inscribed with a skull and crossbones, ship, Mickie Owen's name and the date it was engraved

DANNY O'BRIEN

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Both evoke vintage tattoo designs – definitely the type that you might regret having done after a long night on the beer.

I'm struck by the sheer quality of the hardware on the Zemaitis, and it all looks custom made. The aluminium bridge parts are extremely solid and everything bolts together so firmly – extraneous noises would be inconceivable.

A rear headstock veneer tapers into the slim but wide D-profile neck. The ebony board is bound, but Tony would saw through the binding to install the skinny but tall frets. A weight of almost 10lbs puts this one on a par with typical Les Pauls of the era, and acoustically it's surprisingly resonant. Maybe the extensive cutouts for the active circuitry and extra controls help, but the chiselled-out recesses would make you believe Tony was unacquainted with routers and the crude backplate does not appear to be O'Brien's work.

Above **The Zemaitis' dual-humbucker setup delivers a wide spectrum of highly usable tones.**

Examining a Zemaitis in person reveals just how much the standards we expect of bespoke guitars have changed since Mickie ordered his model. It's not as if it's badly made – far from it because this example couldn't be more structurally sound – but the obsessive attention to detail and finishing perfection we might associate with contemporary builders isn't in evidence. Instead, you get something that is proudly and defiantly handmade, and therein lays the charm.

I'm struck by the sheer quality of the hardware on the Zemaitis, and it all looks custom made

In use

Despite appearances, this is not a regular Les Paul-style layout. Both volume controls are placed above the tone controls and their arrangement corresponds with the pickup placement; so the neck volume is closest to the bridge. The pickup selector feels nothing like a Switchcraft-style switch. Instead, it feels stiff and solid, and it clunks into position like the stubby stick shift of a classic sports car.

When I first plugged in, I discovered a very enjoyable range of tones that were very much in line with expectations of a dual-humbucker solidbody. The pickups are clear and articulate, with a mellow delivery and forward mids. They are quite dark and I noticed an interesting overtone in the upper- >

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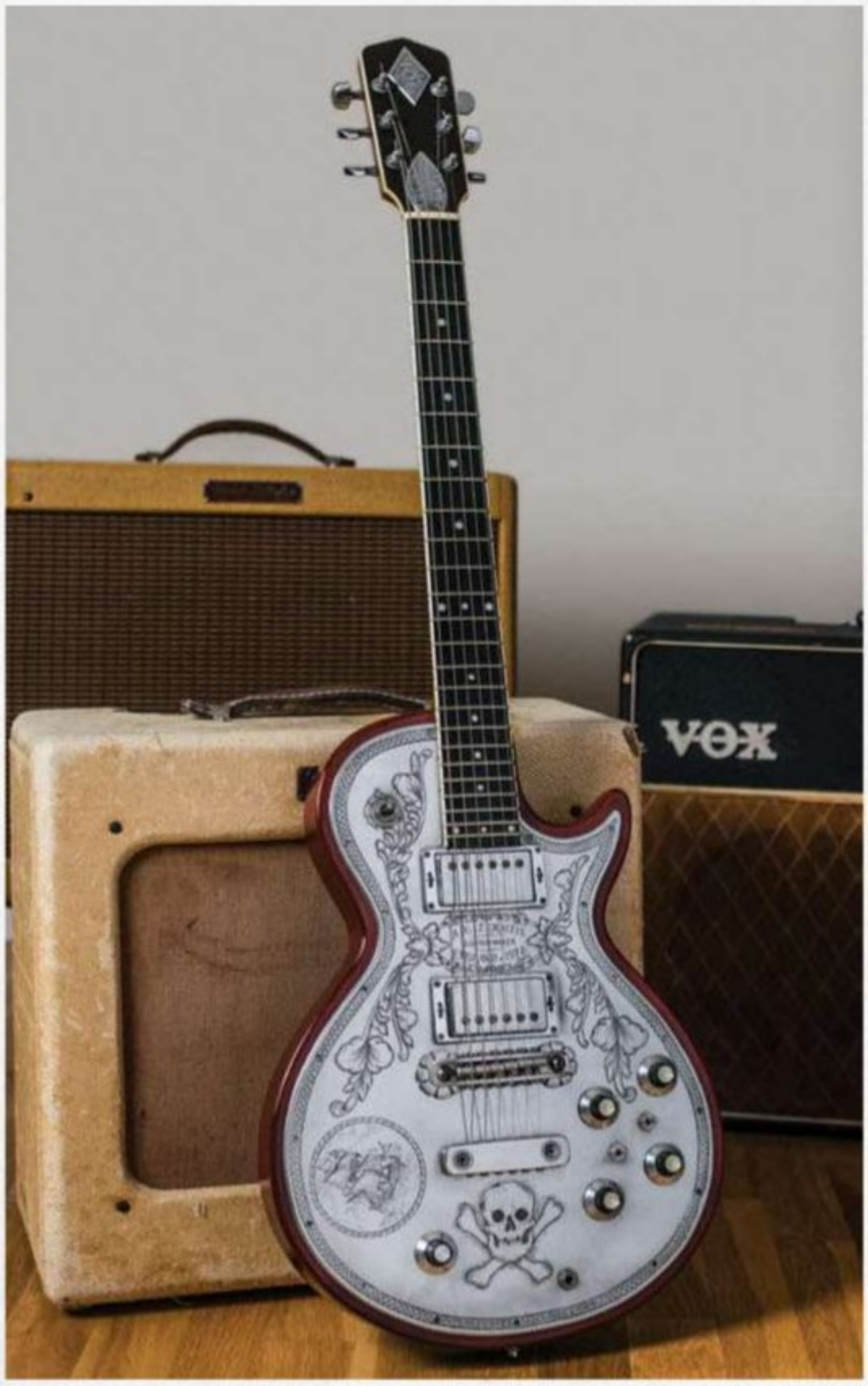

mids – almost like a cocked wah. The bottom toggle switch, located between the tone controls, activates the Zemaitis' bass cut. Similar to the Varitone in concept, there's a sizeable drop in output as the tone takes on a scratchy hollowed-out honk that's a whole lot of fun on its own and even better when bolstered by the bridge pickup.

The trick is to back off the bridge volume a tad to balance things out, and you'll hear a dark jangle with natural compression that is utterly distinctive. It adds a raft of usable tones, especially when running through a clean amp.

This guitar puts 70s-style rock tones at your fingertips. To call it muscular would be an understatement

The onboard preamp on this Zemaitis should carry a government heath warning. The upper switch activates the preamp with a gentle click and the control knob adjusts the output level from 'is it on?' to 'you can't be serious'. If you're playing through a clean valve amp, when you activate the boost you get instant crunch, sweet sustain and bone-crushing power. Remember, this Zemaitis was commissioned at a time when high-gain amps were not commonplace. We may take easy overdrive, distortion and sustain for granted these days, but back then guitarists had to put considerable effort into achieving heavy-rock tones – especially for soloing. This guitar puts 70s-style rock and metal tones at your fingertips, and to call it muscular would be an understatement.

The preamp also brightens the tone in a very useful way and adds a degree of punch to the front end of notes. This means that you can pile on the overdrive but still comfortably cut through a band mix. The controls are hardly intuitive, but once you figure out how everything interacts there's a vast range of clean and dirty tones to be accessed by a small turn of a knob or a quick flick of a switch.

This Zemaitis sounds as special and distinctive as it looks. However, you do need to experiment and dig deep before you can understand how sophisticated and versatile it is.

For me, it wasn't love at first strum, but once I figured it out, I understood why so many name players, who could afford any guitar they wanted, bought one of these. Thanks for the loan Mickie, it was both a pleasure and a privilege.

Above left **It may share its shape and basic layout with the Les Paul, but this is a very different guitar to the iconic Gibson**
Right **Further artistic flourishes at the headstock underline this guitar's unique handmade appeal**

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Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

HARRY SEVEN

Lars Mullen gets a tour of an unusual and eclectic collection that covers synth-guitar tech, 70s and 80s shred machines and plenty more besides...

Harry Seven has a massive collection of guitar synths, along with walls of rack gear that defined a period in guitar technology that many players choose to ignore. He explains: "All my synth-related gear is totally out of date, no one really wants it, so I'm in a good position as a collector and a total hoarder. As you can see, I have lots of controllers and fridge-sized racks that go with it all. It's so nice to be able to afford it now and actually use it.

"I was originally a bit of a punk, I bought a guitar which I couldn't play and was in a band within a week," he laughs. "But my penchant for guitars morphed into the electronic hardware of the 80s. I loved all that guitar synth technology and the music, the likes of Gary Numan and Tubeway Army, and the John Foxx era of Ultravox. When the SynthAxe arrived, it was like something from another planet and a typical example of music technology in the late 70s and early 80s. A lot of products launched were designed to change the way a guitar was played and would sound. The SynthAxe is a highly sophisticated MIDI controller, which has no onboard sound-generation capabilities. It's a prime example of cutting-edge technology at that time, but now relegated to the dustbin. With an original price tag of around £10,000, it wasn't for the faint-hearted.

"Like the Stepp DG1, there's a complete disconnect between the fretted strings and the strings you play, all six of which are the same gauge – all top Es. Each fret is split into six smaller sections for triggering purposes, one per string. It's a self-contained guitar controller-interface and analogue synth engine. The floor unit has the same chips that were used in the Prophet 5, and the electronics were by Dave Simmons, of Simmons Drums fame.

"When the SynthAxe arrived, it was like something from another planet"

"It was all going really well when I trialled it before buying, but after 10 minutes acrid smoke started pouring out of the rear vents of the power supply located in the massive floor unit. Several PSU boards were fried, but I've had them repaired. The most famous Stepp user was probably Allan Holdsworth. I was told my model belonged to Chris Rea, although I've never had that verified.

"I have two Roland G-707s, or the Dalek's Handbag as they were nicknamed. One has been >

Above **Harry with his Stepp DG1**
Opposite top **A small cross-section of Harry's incredible collection of synth controllers and guitars**
Bottom left **The SynthAxe**
Bottom right (left to right) **Modified Squier Strat, two Bond Electraglides**

Private Collection

fitted with a Carvin humbucker at the bridge. The bar down the side of the neck was designed to aid tuning stability and tracking. I remember the old Jimmy Page ads for these, it looked so futuristic."

Not all 80s synth guitars looked like props from science-fiction films – some actually resembled guitars. "The GR Series was Roland's first foray into guitar synthesis and I have a G-202 and a G-505 here," Harry recalls. "I also have four G-700 foot controllers, which are all suffering from issues with the 80017A voice chips, a common problem, but quite easily fixable. I sold my last GR-300 to Alex Kapranos from Franz Ferdinand some years ago. Alex, if you're reading this, sell it back to me!

"My Ibanez IMG2010 X-ING is actually a recent acquisition, and one of the most highly-rated of the Roland 24-pin GR controllers. The vibrato isn't connected to the strings, instead it sends pitch control data to the synth.

"Casio were also major players in the guitar synth market – the PG-300 from the late 80s was, and still is, a quality guitar. I found this one in bits in the back of a music shop. A common problem with these guitars is capacitor failure, everything glitches and eventually the whole MIDI side of things can stop working.

"The Bond Electraglide was another great 80s innovation. It was fabricated from carbon fibre, with a stepped aluminium fretboard. Pickup selection, volume and tone controls were all electronic with a status LED display. I still like the look of this model, I have two now but only one with the required external power supply. Famous users at the time were people like The Edge, Mick Jones and Dave Stewart. In the mid-80s, you could barely pick up a music magazine without seeing someone clutching one.

"I have some of the later Roland onboard guitar synths, the GK-2A for example, which I have installed within a modified Squier Strat, and a Fender with LED position markers.

"I sold my last GR-300 to Alex from Franz Ferdinand. If you're reading this, sell it back!"

"The Godwin Guitar Organ was manufactured by Italian company Sisme in the mid-70s and is essentially an electronic organ squeezed and chopped to fit within the triggering capabilities of an electric guitar. Like the SynthAxe, each fret is split into six sections – holding down a note completes an electronic circuit. The neck is crammed with wires, as there are six to each fret. Sadly, they weren't the most reliable of instruments and at some point mine had all of the circuit boards removed, so it functions as a standard electric guitar these days. I'm on the lookout for a complete one, though.

"Together, guitar synths and pointy headstock guitars played a big part in hits for metal bands during the 80s," Harry recalls. "Well, what's a guitar collection without some big hair-metal 80s hot rod guitars? I have several, including a Robin >

Above left (left to right) **Harmony H75, Framus Star Bass converted to four-string guitar, Godwin Guitar Organ**
Above centre **Fender Strat with LED fretboard markers and onboard Roland GK-2A**
Above right **Some of Harry's 80s shred guitars**

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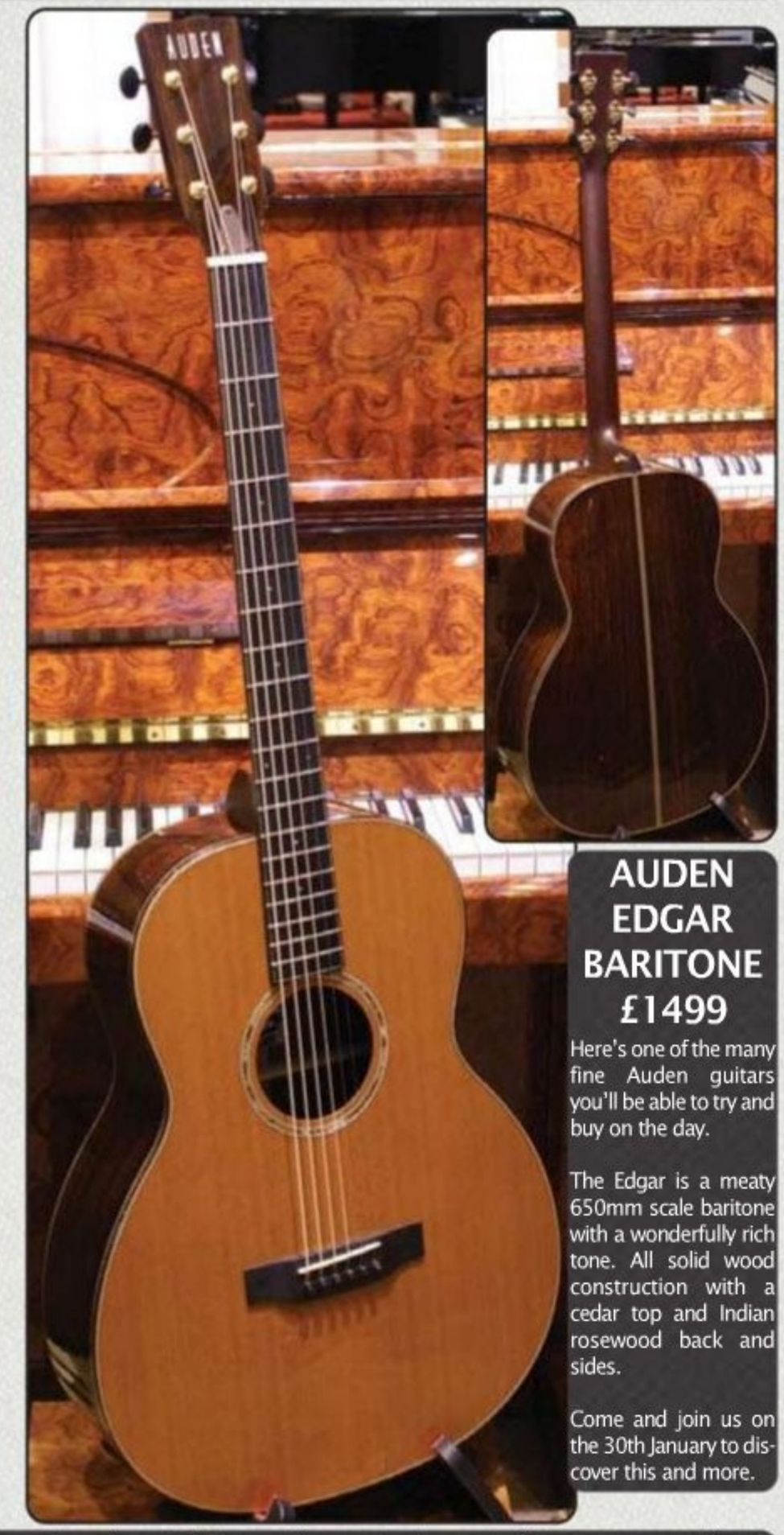

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(Left to right) Epiphone S900, Ralph Bown Brian May, modified Vox Standard 25

Some of Harry's Jaguars with an Electric 12 (centre) and a Musicmaster (fourth from left)

(Left to right) Jag-style guitar built by Jamie Davey, hybrid guitar project, Mosrite-style bass converted to a six-string

Collection of Jamie Davey guitars, including floral T-type guitar (right)

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SHOW US YOUR COLLECTION

Medley Custom TX, Ibanez RG550, Epiphone EM-2 Rebel, Peavey Tracers and Charvel Model 5s and 550s. I also have a passion for early Hamers from this period, especially models like the Centaura, Chaparral, Diablo and the Steve Stevens Custom, which isn't crazing like a lot of older Hamers that use nitrocellulose lacquer. The action is probably the lowest of all my guitars.

"Apart from being extraordinarily heavy, this all-solid mahogany Red Special tribute is quite unique; it could be a one-off, as Ralph Bown is primarily an acoustic maker for some of the world's finest fingerpickers. This is a stunning guitar in every sense of the word."

As with all trends and fashions, the guitar synth period and big hair metal went out of style – was Harry forlorn? Not in the slightest, it turns out.

"Everyone bought a Fender Jaguar and went into grunge," he laughs. "A Jaguar is a million miles from anything resembling synth technology, but I adore the offset body shape. For this next bunch, I've included six Jaguars from the 60s and 70s, an Electric 12 and sneaked in a cool Musicmaster.

"There's another Jaguar-style guitar that's built from a box of Höfner spares that I took to custom guitar builder Jamie Davey and asked him to put it all together. I rate Jamie as not only one of the finest UK guitar builders, but also a guy who remains calm when I turn up at his workshop bearing a pile of bits which I want turning into a guitar. He's also worked his magic on an offset Mosrite-style bass, which I've turned into a six-string baritone.

"I've probably owned about 18 Jamie Davey custom-built models in the past. I currently have five T-types and a cool S-type guitar emblazoned with a number 5 on the body. To me, these are classics that have been taken to the next level. I also have a bunch of classic Fender Strats and Teles here. Some have been modified a little and some are stock. I don't think I need to sing their praises, I love them all.

"My first ever professional six-string electric was a '77 Yamaha SG1000, which I bought in the 80s and regretted selling the moment the guy drove away with it. I finally tracked him down and got it back 25 years later.

"A Jaguar is a million miles away from synth technology, but I adore the offset body shape"

"There's a huge amount of debate about fake guitars that's never going to be resolved. I have a few that I wouldn't think twice about taking a router to. I wouldn't do that if it was the genuine article. "I love the patination that my guitars have acquired over the years, I have no interest in case-queens, so in my collection you'll find something battered and bruised which tells a story, rather than something immaculate or refinished. This also applies to so many interesting vintage amps I have stored in a lockup with these guitars."

Look out for part two of Harry Seven's collection in a future issue, featuring a wide selection of amps from the 60s, 70s and 80s.

Above left (left to right) **Early Gordon-Smith, Rickenbacker 330, 1977 Yamaha SG 1000**
Above right **Some of Harry's Fender Strats and Teles**

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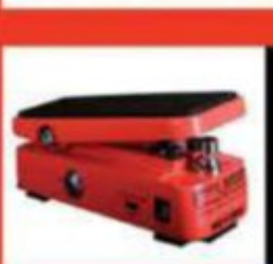

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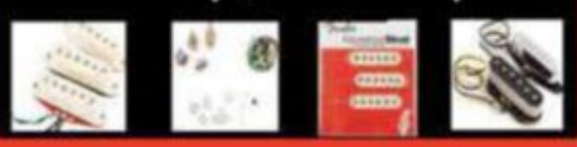

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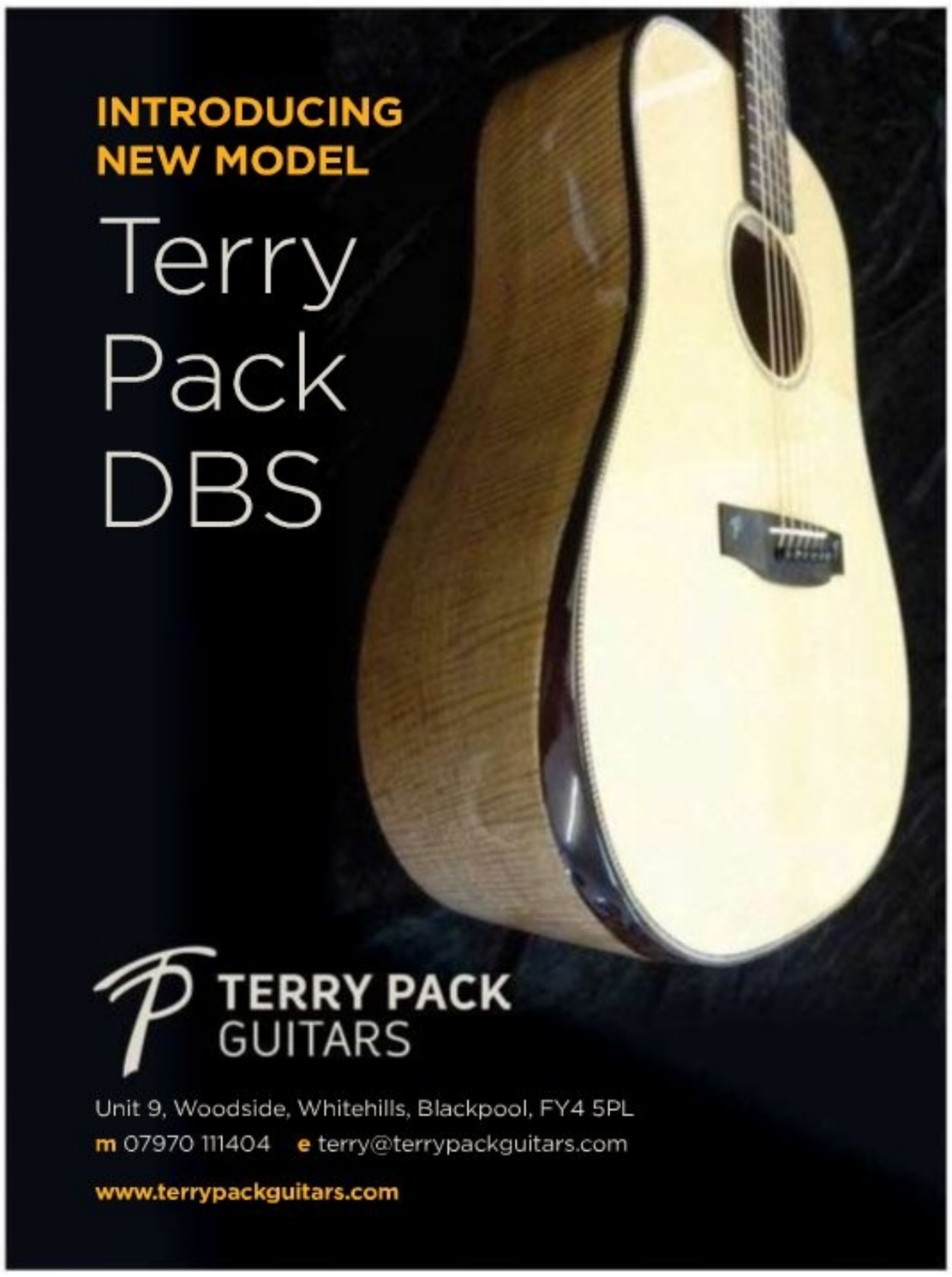

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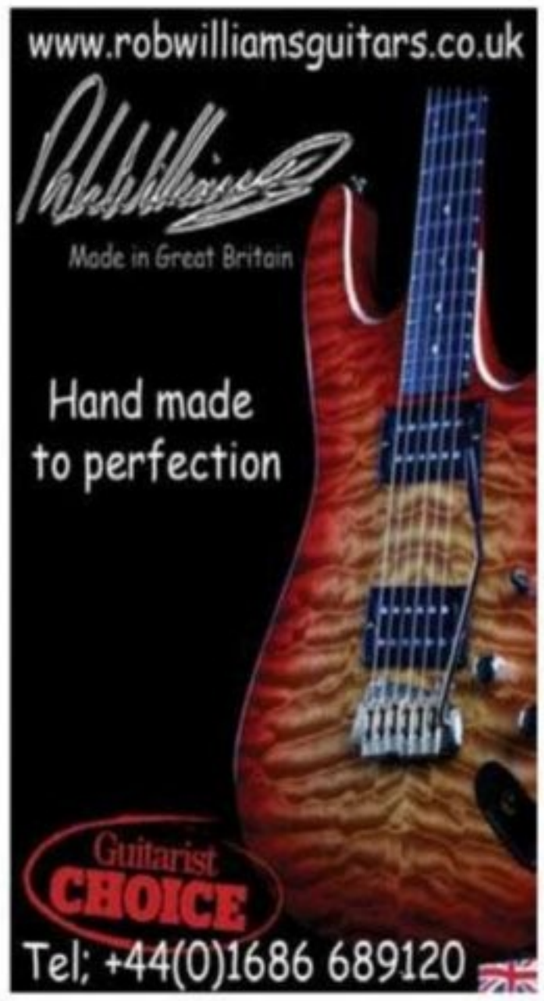

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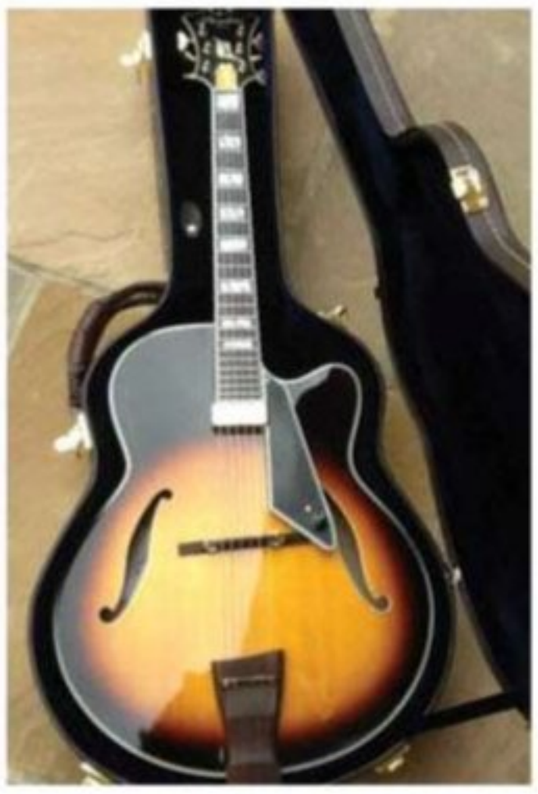

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All about... Modulation

A number of classic effects come under the umbrella of modulation. **HUW PRICE** explains how to tell your vibrato from your chorus and your phaser from your rotary speaker...

Modulation, in stompbox terms, generally means adding inaudible electronic information to components in the signal path to create audible effects. In last month's feature on tremolo we explained how an oscillator circuit generates a varying voltage to modulate valve bias or a light source alters volume.

This is called amplitude modulation, but when we use the term 'modulation' we're usually referring to pitch. Parameters such as phase, frequency and delay can also be modulated to create effects such as vibrato, chorus, phasing, flanging and more. So, let's look at the way modulation effects evolved.

Rotating speakers

Pitch modulation is commonly known as vibrato. Designed to be used with Hammond organs, the first electronic vibrato devices were rotating speakers. Introduced in 1940, Leslie speaker cabinets featured onboard valve amplifiers with a spinning horn and a rotating cylindrical baffle for the bass.

Rotating speakers rely on the Doppler effect and the result is a spectacular and complex mash-up of pitch modulation, tremolo and phasing that sounds amazing on electric guitar as well as organ. Check out the arpeggios in *Badge* by Cream, Hendrix's *Little Wing* solo and Buddy Guy's playing on Junior Wells' *Hoodoo Man Blues*.

Several other companies have made rotating speakers, with Fender's Vibratone having been used by some high-profile players and the Yamaha RA-200 a long-standing favourite of David Gilmour. Leslie fans who are not served by a team of roadies might check out the Strymon Lex, Boss RT-20 or the valve-driven Hughes & Kettner Rotosphere instead.

Vibrato effects

Like tremolo, vibrato can be produced electronically as well as mechanically. Just after World War Two, Hammond engineer John Hannert developed a vibrato using an electronic delay line to modulate pitch.

In their simplest form, vibrato pedals use an array of capacitors to create a very short analogue delay

Although Gibson introduced a standalone vibrato effect unit called the GA-V 1 in 1956, most vibratos were built into amps and employed valve circuitry. Most revered is the Magnatone vibrato used by Duane Eddy and Lonnie Mack, but the effect sounds closer to a pitch-shifting tremolo or a rudimentary chorus.

Compared to tremolo, valve vibrato circuits were complex and expensive to make. Transistors made it possible to build smaller and cheaper vibrato effects into stompbox enclosures. Typically, these pedals had only speed and depth controls.

In their simplest form, vibrato pedals use an array of capacitors to create a very short analogue delay. There will also be an oscillator that modulates the delay time. Much like the Doppler effect, as the delay time increases and decreases, the pitch changes accordingly.

Vibrato effects were popular with surf and 60s garage bands. For a vintage Magnatone-type vibrato, the Bigfoot Magnavibe has a lot of fans. Vibrato enjoyed a low-key comeback amongst shoegazers and Brit-poppers, with the Boss VB-2 featuring on a lot of 80s and 90s records.

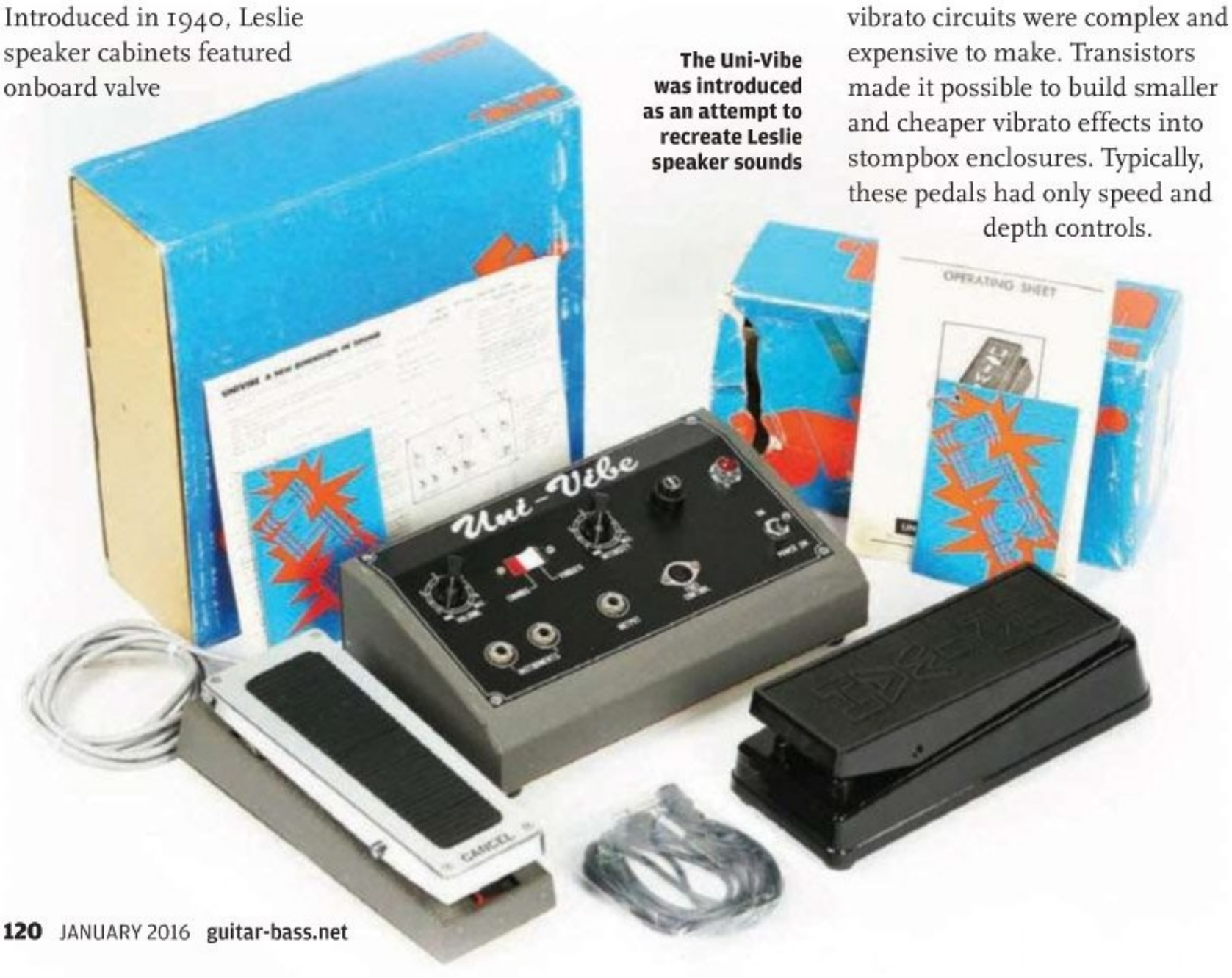
Chorus

Many players have discovered they can get good vibrato effects from their chorus pedals because vibrato and chorus are so closely related. Chorus pedals are based on John Hannet's work during the 1940s when he created a simple 'chorus' effect for Hammond organs. The trick is to combine the pitch-modulated and dry signals.

The Boss CE-1 Chorus Ensemble was the first Boss stompbox, as well as the first commercially available chorus pedal. The circuit first featured in the Roland JC-120 amplifier, with the stompbox version following in 1976. The depth and rate controls still came under the vibrato bracket and the chorus/intensity control balanced the wet and dry signals. It even had a second footswitch to toggle between chorus and vibrato.

Before long, the sizable mains-powered CE-1 enclosure had evolved into the smaller CE-2 – minus the vibrato option. By the end of the 1970s almost every pedal manufacturer was making a chorus of some sort.

All this was made possible by the development of 'bucket



The Uni-Vibe was introduced as an attempt to recreate Leslie speaker sounds

Fender's Vibratone became a popular rotary speaker in the late 60s and early 70s

brigade devices' (BBD). These were chips that could store packets of charge and move them along a line like buckets of water. The number of storage cells and the clock frequency determine the delay time.

Previously, engineers had been forced to use multiple capacitors to delay the signal, but classic BBDs such as the Phillips TDA1022 held several hundred stages on a single chip and so achieved longer delay times.

Many of the chorus pedals that followed were great in their own right, but all are derived from the CE-1. Chorus was intended to add richness and complexity to guitar tones, in much the same way that a 12-string guitar differs from a six-string instrument.

Thanks to the efforts of Andy Summers and others, chorus became one of the cornerstones of 1980s electric guitar tone. As such, it divided opinion like no other effect until the EHX Small Clone on Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit* made chorus cool once again. Well, sort of...

Flangers and phasers

Flanging started as a studio trick engineers performed with tape machines, and you may have heard it on *Itchycoo Park* by The Small Faces. With two reel-to-reel machines playing the same material in sync, one machine is slowed using gentle hand pressure on the tape spool. This introduces an extremely short time delay – much shorter than vibrato and chorus. Comb filtering results, where some frequencies are phase cancelled and others are reinforced. If the frequency response is plotted, comb filtering shows up as a series of narrow notches – like the teeth of a comb. At this point, the effect isn't like flanging, but you can hear what it sounds like by using the 'filter matrix' setting on an EHX Electric Mistress.

Tape flanging worked because it's impossible to maintain consistent finger pressure and the delay fluctuates. To achieve a swooshing flanger effect electronically, the delay must be modulated and the delayed and comb filtered signal is then mixed in with the dry signal.

Phasing is closely related to flanging but more complex. Delay-induced phase shift is combined with all-pass filtering, so the delay time is not constant across the audio spectrum. Phasers generally have multiple stages that are added to the delay line – hence the MXR 45, 90 and 100. Modulating the filter frequency creates the phasing effect and as filters are capacitor/resistor networks, that means modulating the resistance value.

And the rest

We've covered the main modulation effects, but there are others. The Shine-ei Uni-Vibe has played a huge part in the history of rock guitar and was a favourite of Hendrix, Robin Trower and David Gilmour. Although there was a chorus/vibrato switch on the front, it was also a four-stage phaser with photo resistors.

As perhaps the earliest attempt to simulate a Leslie sound in a stompbox, the Uni-Vibe is a modulation pedal that's hard to categorise. Honourable mentions must also be given to ring modulators, vocoders, auto-wahs, panners and octave generators. It's a mod mod world...

BUYER'S GUIDE

There's a nearly limitless range of modulation pedals on the market, made by all manner of manufacturers. We round up a few essential pedals to try out, covering chorus, vibrato, rotating speaker effects and plenty more besides...

STRYMON LEX £249

Replicating the sonic qualities ad mechanical quirks of a rotating speaker has always been a challenge for pedal designers. Strymon uses digital modeling technology for this stereo Leslie simulator. Controls include rotor speed, horn level, mic distance and preamp drive, and you can even attach an expression pedal with assignable control.

FULLTONE MDV-3 MINI DEJA VIBE 3 £169

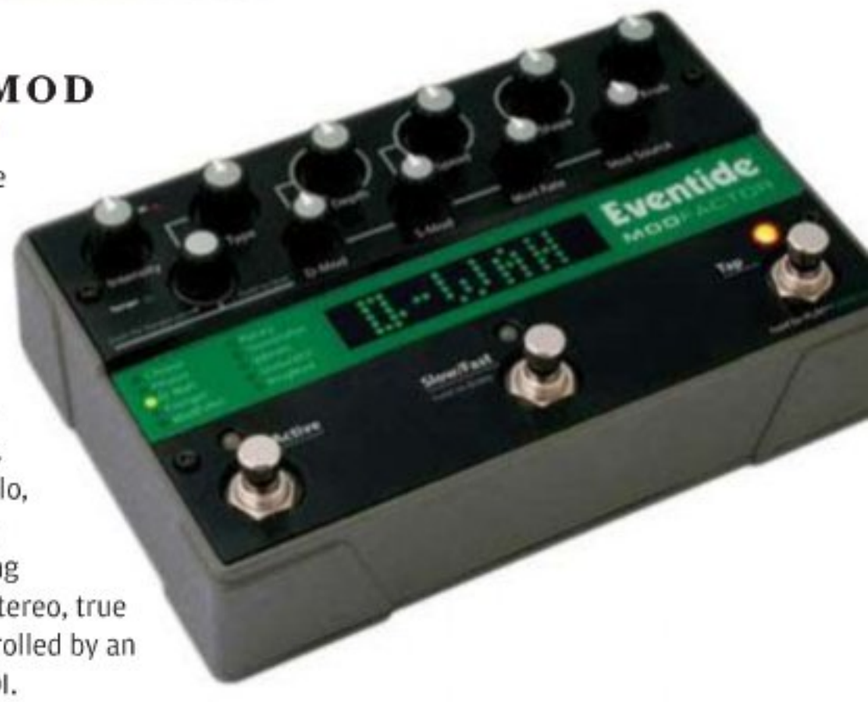
Built into a wah-style enclosure with side-mounted controls this recreation of the Uni-Vibe seems to satisfy the purists. The photocells are specially made clones of the 60s originals and all the transistors are 'new old stock' and vintage-correct. The only change is made to the speed potentiometer value to improve the low speed response.

TC ELECTRONIC STEREO CHORUS PLUS £240

TC has been making these for 33 years and Joe Bonamassa and Eric Johnson are known to use them, so this pedal qualifies as a classic. Best of all, the 'plus' bit means that it will cover your flanger and vibrato needs, too. Other features include input gain for clean boost and external bypass switching.

EVENTIDE MOD FACTOR £389

Eventide has been in the modulation game since the beginning, having produced the first electronic flanger. This box of tricks does it all and the effects list includes phaser, flanger, chorus, polymod, tremolo, pan, undulator, vibrato, q-wah, modfilter and ring modulation. It's mono/stereo, true bypass and can be controlled by an expression pedal or MIDI.



Chord Clinic

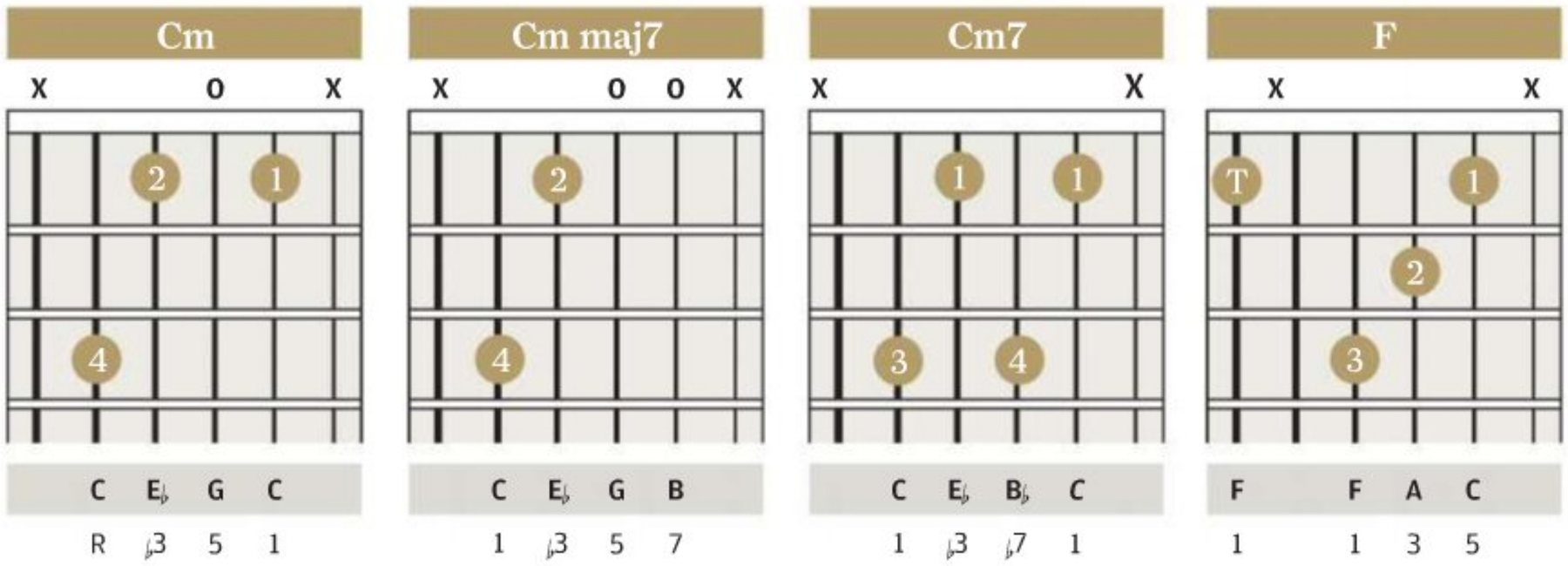
Following on from last month's lesson, here we look at adding major and minor seventh intervals to minor triads and introduce the odd-sounding minor major. **ROD FOGG** gets dissonant...

Adding sevenths to minor triads

In last month's lesson we looked at what happens when you add a major seventh or a minor seventh interval to a major triad, and we found that you get either a major seventh chord (Cmaj7=CEGB) or a dominant seventh chord (C7=CEGB♭). This time around, we're going to explore what happens when you add the same intervals to a minor triad. Be prepared for some crunchy clashes in these chords – or as we call it in the business, dissonance. The C minor triad is constructed from the notes C, E♭ and G.

Figure 1 starts with a C minor chord built from these three notes. It's a tricky one, but bear with me because it gets easier from here. You can mute the low E string with the tip of your fourth finger and the high E string with the underside of your first finger. That's why it's got this kind of 'back to front' fingering. If you find the muting tricky, play it fingerstyle using the thumb and first three fingers of your picking hand, or just pick really carefully.

Adding sevenths to minor triads (Fig 1)



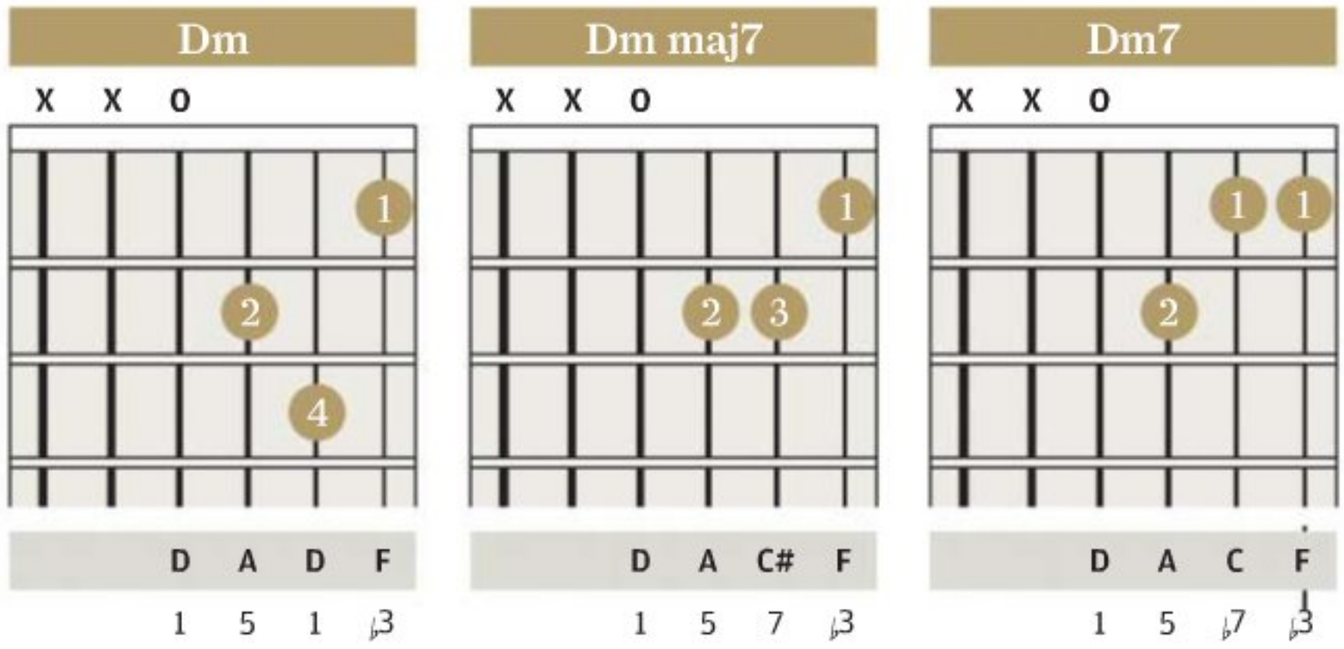
Minor major

Next comes 'C minor major seventh' (CmMaj7), which is a breeze because you just have to let go of your first finger – again, don't sound that open E string. Then we have the C minor triad with the minor seventh, which we just call C minor 7 (Cm7). Just to show you where this kind of progression can go, I have also included a 'thumb over' F major chord. Take a second look at that Cm7 chord in figure 1. There is an alternative voicing – quite a dissonant one – for the CmMaj7 chord, made by just pushing the pinky up a fret from B♭ to B natural. There's no fifth in either of these chords – it's OK to leave the fifth out, as of all the notes in the chord it contributes the least to the sound.

Try alternating these chords one after the other, while perhaps picking an arpeggio. I feel the introduction to a dark metal epic coming on.

Another voicing (Fig 2)

Progression in D minor (Fig 3)



Croce encounters

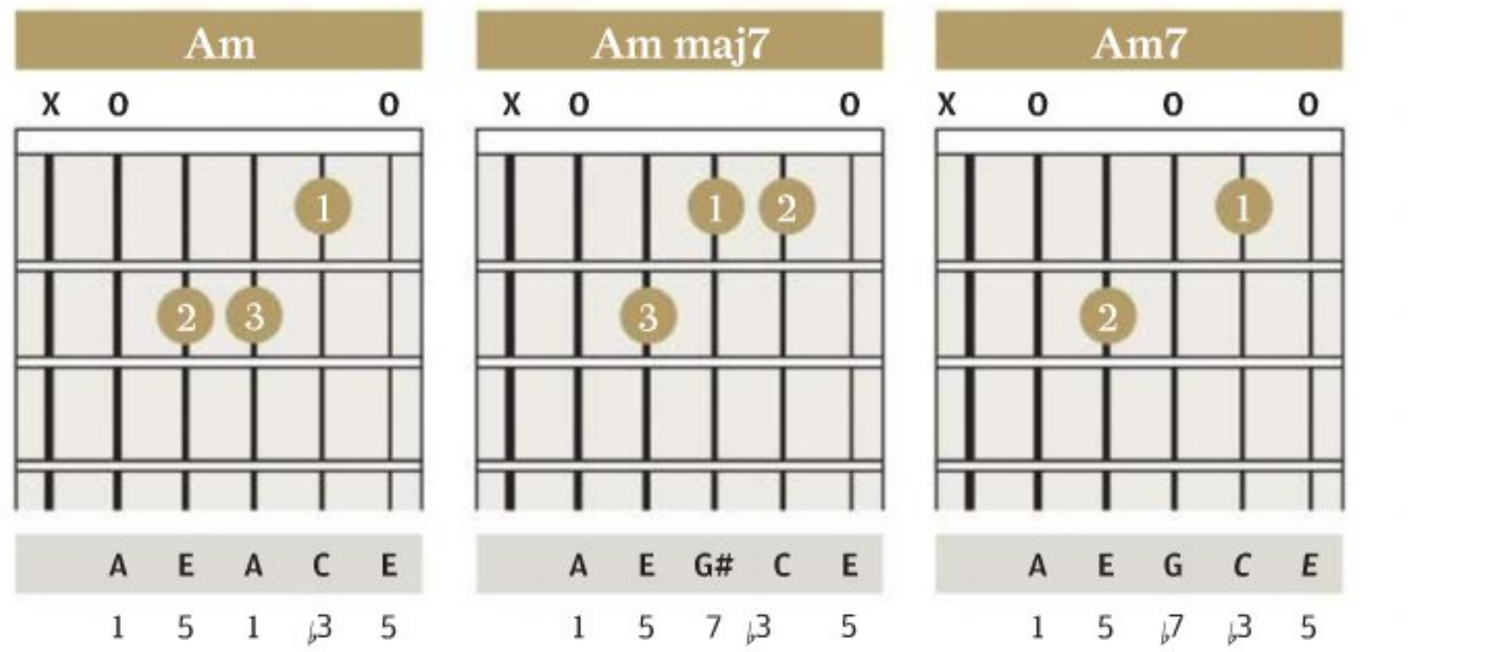
Let's face it, the minor major seventh is a weird-sounding chord, so you probably won't be all that surprised to discover that it's not easy to find it in many musical examples. Figure 3 shows the same progression as figure 1, but this time in D minor. These also happen to be the first three chords of Jim Croce's wistful ballad *Time In A Bottle*. The fourth chord would be G major, and this song turns out to be something of a gem, because in all the world of popular music I couldn't find another song which uses this exact sequence. In the jazz world, Duke Ellington's *In A Sentimental Mood* uses the same chords, but goes to G minor, not major.

DmMaj7 is also the third chord of Pink Floyd's *Us And Them*, and there's a rare outing for FmMaj7 as the fourth chord in Mariah Carey's *Visions Of Love*. As I said, they are not exactly common.

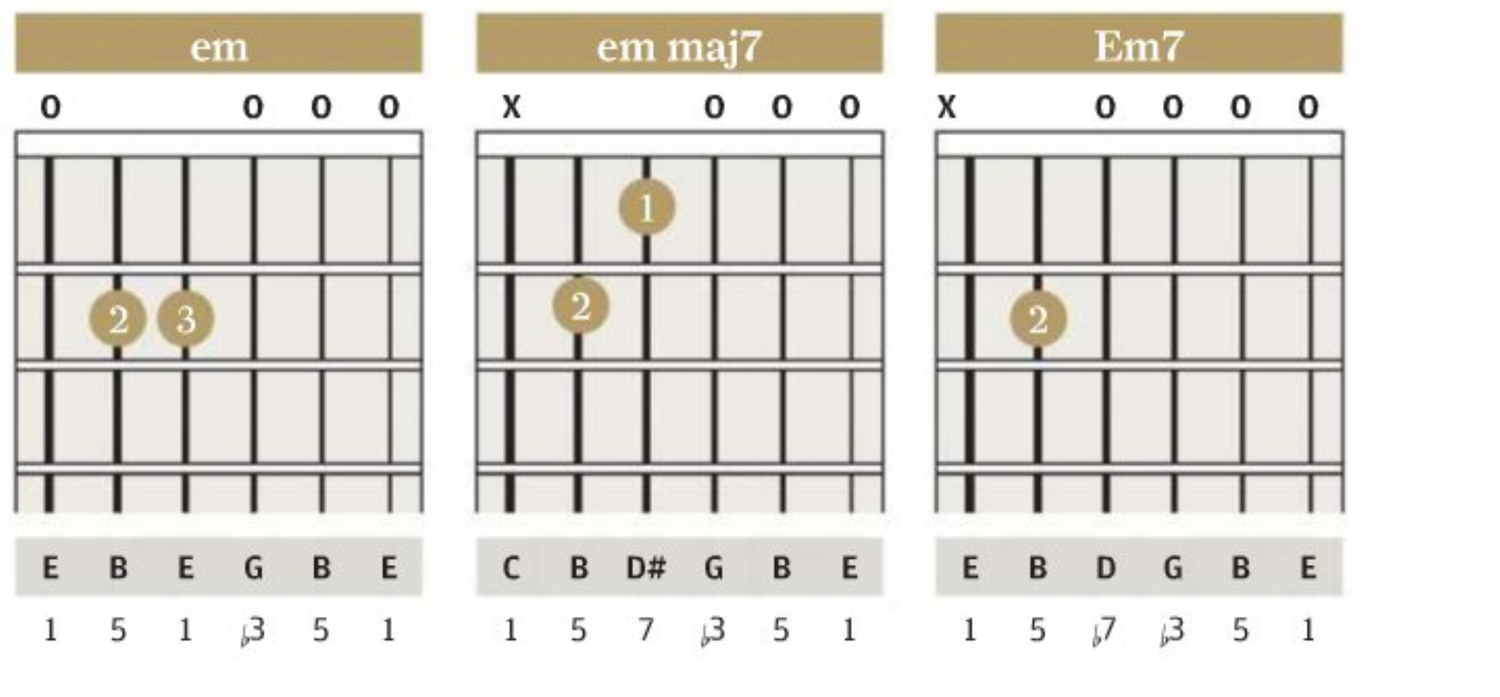
Since I'm trying to start a trend, here's the same sequence again – this time starting on A minor. Play D as the fourth chord or, just to keep things dark, try D minor. In fact, you should try following the A minor chords with the D minor chord sequence from figure 3, then go to E7 (come on, we did these last month) and then go around again.

The sequence also works in E minor, although the low D# in EmMaj7 is a bit >

A minor (Fig 4)



E minor (Fig 5)



murky. Written out here we have strumable six-string chords, but they would probably sound better if you finger picked just the top four strings working through the progression. Add an A major chord at the end, or try going round the A minor chord sequence from figure 4, ending with a B7 chord and repeat ad lib.

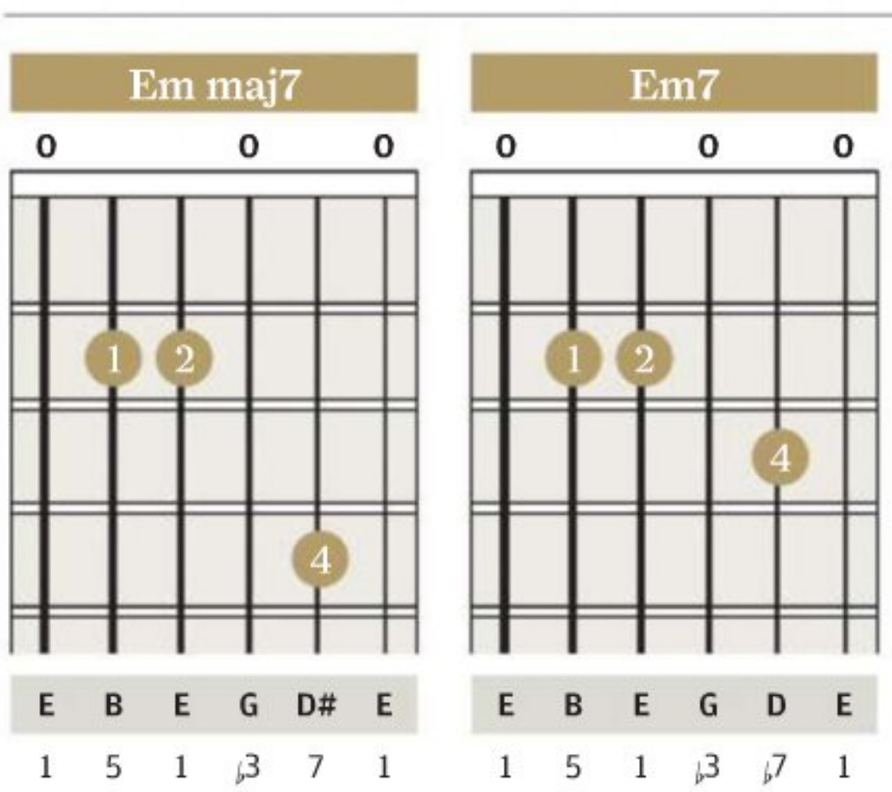
Insert figure 6

Just in case you find those low voicings too much to bear figure 6 takes the sevenths up an octave. The EmMaj7 produces a bit of a clash between the open E string and the D#. It's an acquired taste, helped by flowing arpeggios and moving quickly on to the Em7 chord.

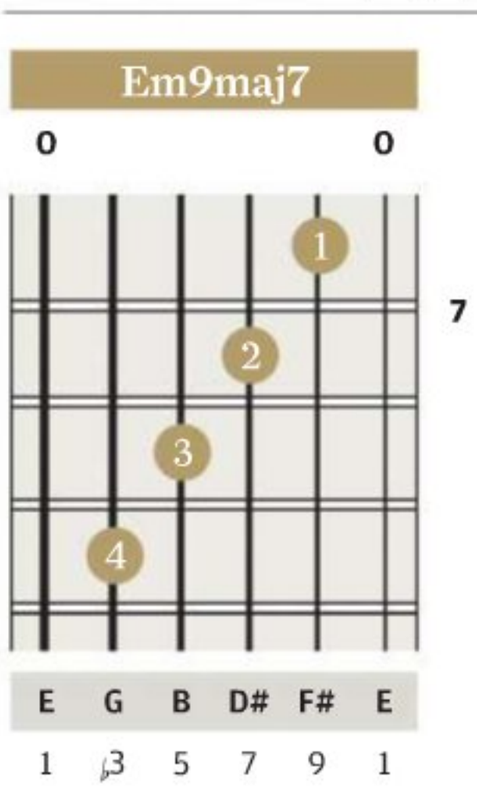
Insert figure 7

We going to finish off with just one more cool-sounding EmMaj7 chord, placing your first finger up at the seventh fret and working your way across the guitar, one finger per fret. Since this one includes the ninth above the root (F#) we are calling it Em9Maj7, but EmMaj7add9 is also possible. It's a fun chord to play on guitar and is the one you hear at the end of the James Bond 007 theme music. Let it ring... and add "Good evening, Mr Bond..."

Take it up an octave (Fig 6)



The 'Bond' chord (Fig 7)



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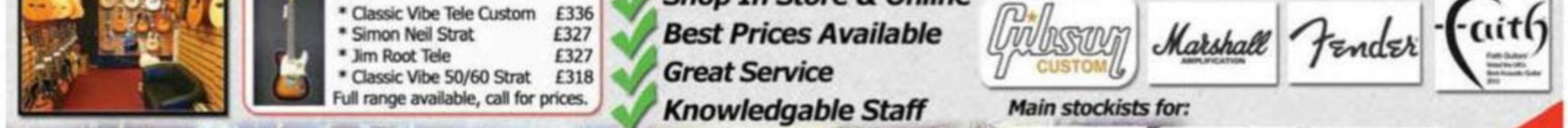

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: When gigs turn violent, pickup corrosion and home-build guitar projects

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Thug life

Having started to read Sid's recent article about 'aggro at gigs', he mentioned a scuffle at a gig in Enfield. I do believe that I was at that particular gig! If it was at Enfield Tech in January 1969, where his band the Deviants were on the same bill as Steamhammer and Timebox, then I definitely remember it! The thugs in question were the 'Enfield Town Mob', who used to go to gigs just to terrorise the bands, who were always easy targets; but luckily for me, the band I was in at the time consisted of local 'hard cases' who knew all the thugs, so we were 'untouchable', but I've seen some ABSOLUTE CARNAGE wrought by these 'erberts in dancehalls around that period, and many bands' gear and vans wrecked. The only band who actually 'charmed' this local mob, and had them eating out of their hands, were the legendary Sam Apple Pie, who entertained them with their bawdy, lewd blues rock. Before I go, I would just like to say how orgamsic that '54 Goldtop you featured in the last issue [G&B November] was!

Bob Sawyer (formerly of Iron Maiden)

***G&B** Thanks Bob, it's always good to receive correspondance from someone who was in a legendary rock band. On the subject of the Goldtop, we're inclined to agree...*

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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ORANGE AMPLIFICATION

Streetfighting man...

Oh dear, Sid Bishop's piece 'I'm never going to play there again!' [*G&B* November 2015], brought back memories of my roadying days in the early 70s working with local bands in and around Hull (following being sacked from my post-school band).

I, too, caused a slight fracas at a gig one evening when working with Hull prog-rock band Bone, who were playing alongside Venom and Snake Eye. A lovely young woman dragged me into the dressing room, where we did some mild exploration and gentle exercises before the bands came on. It was only halfway into the night, when her biker boyfriend realised that something had been going on with 'someone from one of the f**king bands', that I realised this could turn a tad nasty. It did.

The police were very helpful, helping band members out of Marshall and Orange cabinets, and I worked extra hard at the end of the night packing all three bands' gear into Transits and Bedfords.

So many stories, so many happy memories. After many years of not picking up a guitar (or roadying), I have now started playing again, slowly amassing a nice little collection of guitars (Fender Sonoran, Epiphone Les Paul and Wildkat Royale, and my old and trusted Tanglewood acoustic).

Thank you for a great magazine that is motivating me to improve my playing at the grand old age of 61!

Tony Smith, Barry Island

***G&B** Thanks for that erm, revealing story Tony. Glad to here you are playing guitar again!*

Les is more

I really loved the vintage bench tests of the '54 and '57 Les Pauls and look forward to future comparisons.

However, it got me thinking about the correct way to say 'Les Paul'. I, and everyone else I know, says 'Lez Paul', when in fact it should be 'Less Paul' since 'Les' is short for Lester and not Lesley. Does it matter? Probably not - what do you call the guitars? Anyway, either is better than the French inspired 'Lay Paul', which some of my pretentious schoolmates used back in the 70s!

Brett Allen, via email

***G&B** Over the years we've found that Americans are more likely to pronounce it 'Less', while us Brits pronounce it 'Lez'. It certainly isn't French though, that's for sure!*

Going green

I'm lucky to own a 1959 [Gretsch] Single Anniversary that I've had for over 25 years, but to my horror the pickup is turning green. What can I do?! The surround and pickguard are also starting to show marks, it's not damp in my house. Please advise!

Kaiser Matt, Edinburgh

***G&B** Huw Price writes: You are indeed lucky. With a Filter'Tron pickup and trestle bracing, those guitars were one pickup short of 6120 spec, and some people think the single-pickup Gretsches sound better. However, it does seem like you have an issue with corrosion of some sort. It's quite common to see verdigris on gold plate, but your pickup cover should be nickel or chrome plated. It seems odd that the pickguard and surround are also greening. Corrosion of this sort sometimes occurs when a guitar with celluloid nitrate parts is kept in a case. As the celluloid nitrate degrades, it apparently releases corrosive gas that can eat into metal plating and plastic parts. So if your guitar usually lives inside its case, try keeping it outside the case and see if the deterioration slows down.*

Also check if there are any celluloid nitrate bits and pieces inside the case - which may not be original to your guitar. If so, remove them. You may be able to clean up the pickup cover with chrome polish or 3M machine polish. If the metal is too far gone, any decent pickup maker should be able to remove the cover and arrange to have it replated. Don't try to restore gold plating because it will rub off with any abrasive compound. There will be metallic paint on the underside of the pickup surround and, if your Anniversary is a sunburst example, the pickguard too. You could try wiping away any green areas with a damp cloth, but once the greening process has started, it may not be possible to stop it.

If you do manage to revive the look of your guitar with a careful clean-up, clean it every time it is played. If you can't abide the greened-up look, you could fit a new pickup surround and pickguard, but be sure to keep the

Matt's pickiups are showing signs of corrosion

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Charlie Brown's home-build project

Dominic Blaazer's 'Gibtsch', or should that be 'Gretson'?

original parts safe because they are part of the guitar's history and value.

Fixing a hole

Just to say how much I enjoyed being taken in detail through the process of revamping the Mexican Tele [*G&B* November]. Just one suggestion to improve the stopping of unwanted screw holes: rather than a softwood matchstick, I use hardwood cocktail sticks or (for larger holes) hardwood skewers you get for making kebabs. The pointed ends also fit the tapering screw hole better. For even larger holes, I drill them out and glue in a piece of hardwood dowel – especially useful when re-setting a bolt-on neck, as the new holes may be close to the old ones.

Peter Wordsworth, York

Hit single

I thought I should chime in with a variation on the theme of F-hole singlecuts. Made for me almost 20 years ago, I wanted a reflection of my love for P-90s, Scotty Moore and Neil Young. Something with the best of Gibson and Gretsch – a Gibtsch or Gretson, if I may. Auckland luthier Bob Scott bookmatched a block of mahogany then routed the chambers, before adding a maple cap and laminated neck, so the sides and back are solid. The profile and ebony fretboard mirror my '89 LP Jr and Bob handwound the pickups using vintage Alnico slugs. The binding is elderly celluloid, the Ibanez tremolo was gold-plated to match the knobs and Grovers, while the white leather trim is inlaid with cut garnets. The back and sides are a far more sober antique burst. It's a real "growler", with sustained notes having that typical 'bloom' of a good semi-acoustic, and it plays better with each passing year.

Dominic Blaazer, via email

It's all your fault...

It was your red Stratocaster project that made me decide to build an S-type electric. I have no DIY skills and my wife burst out laughing when I told her. The good news is the internet is full of advice! I wanted a high spec if I was going to bother, and so I sourced a lightweight ash body, a pre-wired scratchplate with a Fender '69 pickup in the neck, a Fat 50 in the middle and a SeymourDuncan SSL1 at the bridge. The loaded scratchplate, plus helpful advice, came from the US.

The neck is a compound-ratio, really great. I had a guitar tech fit the bridge. I aged the hardware courtesy of your article, using electrolysis.

The good news is this Strat is the best I have played. It's light, resonant and is my exact spec. She is called Queenie and is just great.

Charlie Brown, via email

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• Aerosmith • Skunk Anansie • Status Quo

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VOL 27 NO 4 ON SALE 07 JAN

•Contents are subject to change

New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues

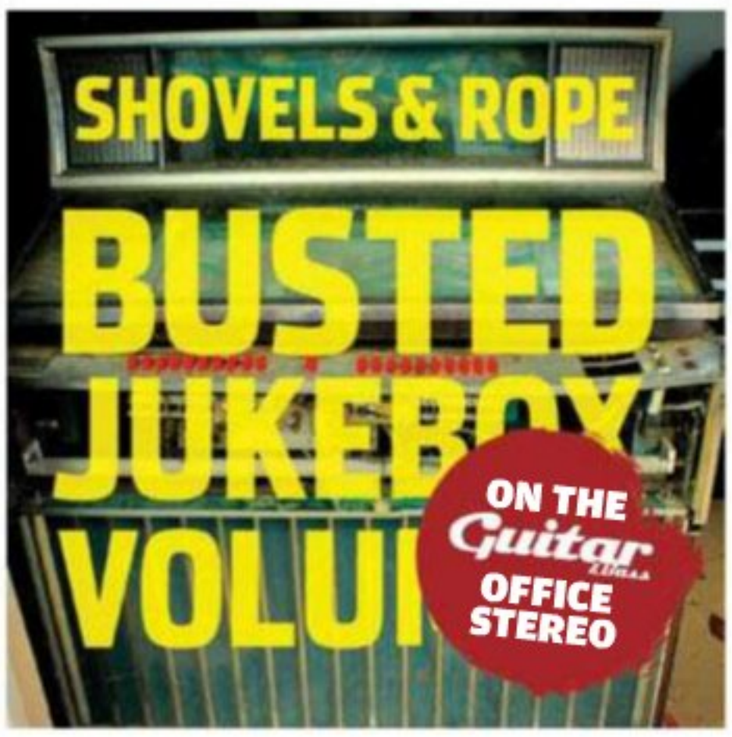
Danny Bryant

BLOOD MONEY

Danny Bryant's latest musical venture is a conscious attempt to hark back to the blues-rock influences he grew up with while listening to his parents' record collection. The title track functions as a mission statement, filled with superlative guitar playing and sleazy blues vibes. Although it would be great to hear Danny's guitar playing at the centre of a more ambitious production, this album still oozes with groove. A guest preformace from Bernie Marsden lends a tastful contribution to the track *Just Won't Burn*, which proves to be a treat and helps round off the album off nicely. All in all, *Blood Money* showcases Bryant's abilities, both as a guitarist and songwriter, and it stands up as an album he can be proud of. If you fancy giving yourself a nostalgic treat that evokes the golden age of electric blues-rock guitar playing, get yourself a copy of this album pronto. **TT**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Joe Bonamassa, Walter Trout*



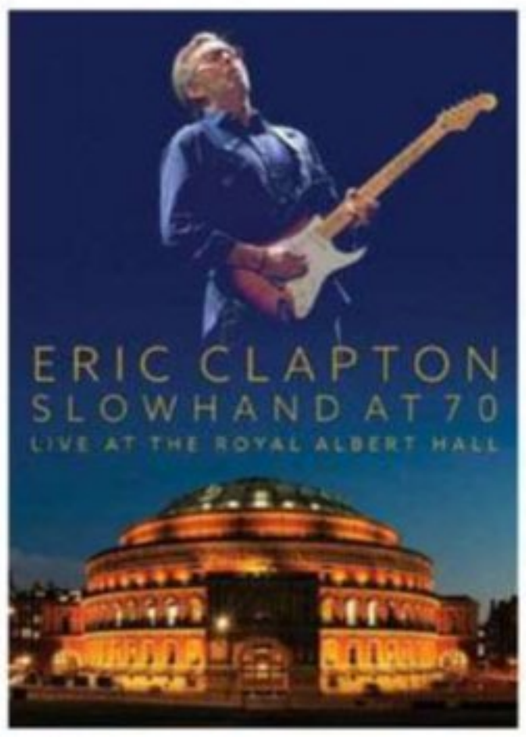
Shovels & Rope

BUSTED JUKEBOX VOLUME 1

South Carolina duo Michael Trent and Cary Ann Hearst, aka Shovels & Rope, have been responsible for some wonderful original music in recent years. *Busted Jukebox*, an album loaded mainly with covers and collaborations, provides an insight into the songs that make them tick, while being a fantastic listen in its own right, full of desolate twang and aching harmonies. Highlights include *Bullet Belt* - a reworking of a song Trent wrote for Butch Walker on which Walker guests - and a brilliant vocal cameo from JD McPherson on Toussaint McCall's *Nothing Takes The Place Of You*. All too often, covers albums can be patchy and self-indulgent, but there's a ramshackle charm and real soul throughout the 10 songs here that makes this essential listening for fans of lo-fi Americana. A thoroughly satifying stop-gap until their next album of original music. **CV**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Bright Eyes, The White Stripes*



Eric Clapton

SLOWHAND AT 70: LIVE AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL DVD

During his half-century career, Clapton has played the Royal Albert Hall a mere 215 times, so he's perfectly entitled to put a rug down - which he does - and relax into a set studded with crowd-pleasers from his extensive back catalogue. His band, featuring stalwarts such as Nathan East, Andy Fairweather Low, Paul Carrack, Steve Gadd and others, are so comfortable they almost seem part of the audience as EC puts his Sunburst Strat (and signature Martin) through its paces on stand-out versions of *Layla*, *Crossroads* and *Cocaine*. It's a shame that this is rumoured to be his farewell to touring, as his playing is the best it's been in years: a showcase of the fluid improv, sublime control and direct, emotionally charged phrasing that's earned him his legendary status, all shot with the guitar player in mind. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Cream, JJ Cale*

Jack Bruce & HR Bigband

MORE JACK THAN BLUES

Back in 2006, Bruce was asked to reprise some Cream numbers and his own repertoire in a big-band context at a German jazz festival. This CD/DVD package captures the show, with Jack loving the way the ensemble stabs bring out the emphasis on his changes in a loping *Spoonful*. On more experimental tunes the band's dynamics complement his immaculate fretless bass playing. **CM**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Cream, John Mayall*

Supersonic Blues Machine

WEST OF FLUSHING, SOUTH OF FRISCO

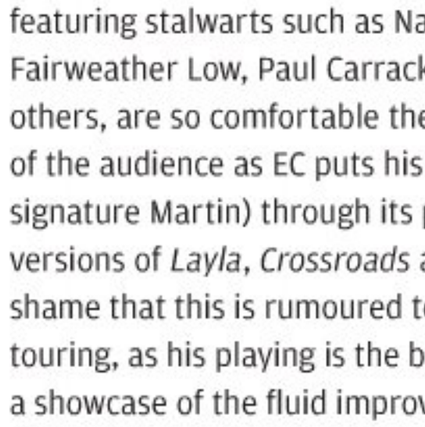
Bassist Fabrizio Grossi, Texan guitarist/vocalist Lance Lopez and drummer Kenny Aronoff bring fine pedigree to this new project, featuring a roll-call of famous guitarists: Billy Gibbons, Warren Haynes, Chris Duarte, Eric Gales, Walter Trout and Robben Ford all make cameos. The result is a sprawling set of blue-collar rock with the emphasis on blues. You won't find more soloing on any release this year. **CM**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Gov't Mule, ZZ Top*

The Temperance Movement

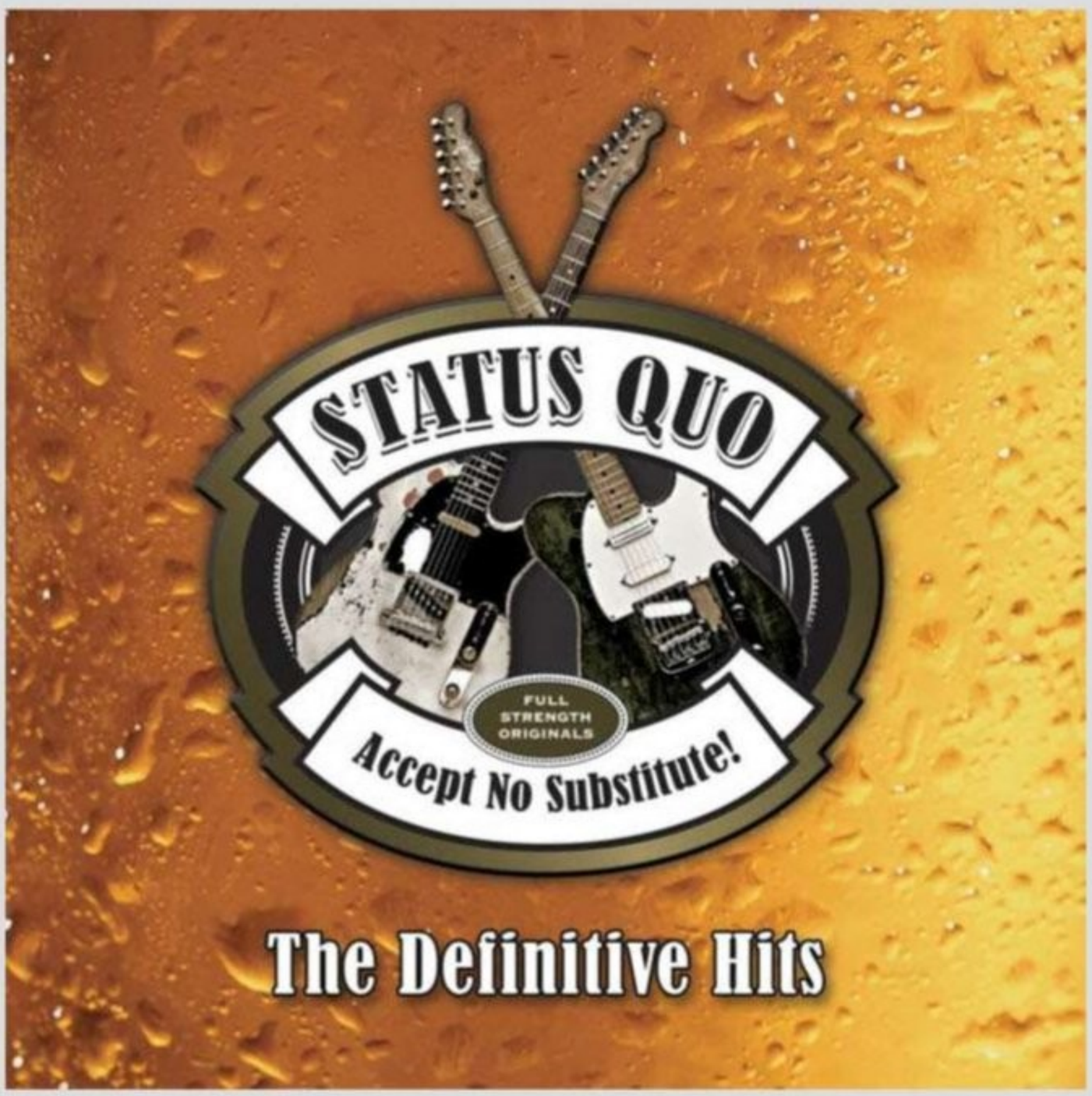
WHITE BEAR



Following a successful summer festival season and a stint supporting The Rolling Stones, The Temperance Movement bring us this full-on rock record, fusing vintage vibes with modern production flavours. With tracks such as *Three Bulleits* and *White Bear* channeling Luke Potashnick and Paul Sayer's inner Jimmy Page, it's a step in the right direction towards, good old-fashioned rock 'n' roll. **TT**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Led Zeppelin, The Black Keys*



FEATURED ALBUM

Status Quo
ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTE

Francis Rossi and Rick Parfitt have been rocking with Status Quo since the late 60s and are still packing them in. *Accept No Substitute: The Definitive Hits* is a three-CD collection accompanied by a double DVD. The CD is bookended with the psychedelic phase of *Pictures Of Matchstick Men* from '68 and the more laid-back version from 2014's *Aquostic (Stripped Bare)* album, with more than 50 hits and 128 million album sales from six decades in between. Popular album tracks and singles that define the Quo legacy are included from 23 studio albums. *Caroline* has been their set opener for the last 25 years and highlights Rossi's songwriting relationship with Bob Young. Parfitt's diversity is reflected on the dreamy *Living On An Island* and upbeat *Mystery Song*. Input from keyboard player Andy Bown is evident on *Whatever You Want*, while bassist John 'Rhino' Edwards shared writing duties on later tracks including *Two Way Traffic* and *Beginning Of The End*. First-generation bassist Alan Lancaster features on live tracks taken from the Frantic Four 2013 line-up. This package is a must for hardcore Quo fans and newcomers, it's also a sonic timeline that reflects the band's ability to re-invent the three-chord structure over and over again. **LM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Status Quo!*

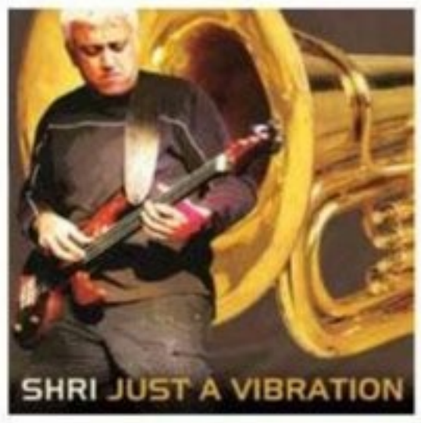
Kurt Cobain
MONTAGE OF HECK: THE HOME RECORDINGS

Released following the *Montage Of Heck* documentary, this comprises demos, spoken-word pieces and sound collages made by the Nirvana star. Any songwriter will recognise the embryonic acoustic sketches here with their nascent lyrics, bum notes and fluffed chord changes; it's an essential part of the creative process but rarely intended for public consumption, even if it contains flashes of later greatness. **CV**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *For hardcore Nirvana fans only...*

Shri Sriram
JUST A VIBRATION



Just A Vibration sees Indian classical and street music mix with traditional brass-band pomp. Shri covers bass, percussion, flute and tabla, backed by Yorkshire's Hammonds Saltaire band. The musical styles range from jazz to Bollywood and Mariachi, with the sitar making a surprisingly natural bedfellow for the brass. It's a meeting of disparate cultural and musical styles that works wonderfully. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Bombay Royale, Nitin Sawhney*

Reissue spotlight

Bruce Springsteen
THE TIES THAT BIND

This long-awaited boxset celebrates the 35th anniversary of Springsteen's 1980 double album *The River* – and it's big! There are 52 songs over four CDS, three DVDS including live footage and a documentary, as well as a 148-page book.

Despite being released at the birth of a new decade, *The River* has always felt like the closing chapter of the first part of Springsteen's career. By the time it was released, the New Jersey Rocker had amassed a staggering wealth of unused material. His final tracklisting for the album proved divisive amongst fans and split the opinions of his own band. Springsteen's vision was to create an album that placed his gritty, harder-edged work alongside lighter, more frivolous material. As a result, the album lacks cohesion, but there is method to the mess. The record contains some of Springsteen's finest compositions: *Independence Day* is a poignant ballad about the fractious relationship between a father and son. The title track is the album's centerpiece and *Wreck On The Highway* is a perfect understated finale.

The River was nearly released a year early in a radically different form, and the third disc here makes that recording available for the first time. While it's interesting to hear how the album could have been, most will be pleased Springsteen decided to take an extra year. What really leaps out from this early recording is the wonderful *Loose Ends*. It's baffling that a song originally deemed good enough to close the album failed to make the final cut. The final disc contains 22 outtakes, many more appetising than some of the lesser entries on the finished album. *Stray Bullet* would grace any Springsteen album and *Whitetown* is a joyous summery pop tune that sounds closer in spirit to some of Springsteen's more recent output, while *The Time That Never Was* harks back to earlier works.

Among the outtakes are songs fans may already be familiar with. The exhilarating rocker *Roulette* would make a great album opener and *Where The Bands Are*, *Dollhouse* and *I Wanna Be With You* are great rock 'n' roll numbers. These outtakes serve as further evidence of what might have been; with a little more careful construction, *The River* had the potential to be Springsteen's defining masterpiece. Unlike in the album's title track, where the protagonist mulls over why, years later, he returns to the river, knowing it's long since run dry, there's no such doubting the wisdom of revisiting this collection. **DA**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Clash, Elvis Costello*

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FRANK SIDORIS

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

Frank Sidoris is the rhythm guitarist in Slash's band The Conspirators, but now it's his turn for a solo...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"As time has gone on, I've been playing my triple-pickup Les Paul. There's something about that guitar; I don't know who they had in mind when they put it together, but it's like I set it up, that neck profile... everything about it."

2 In another life, I would be...
"I love photography. Growing up, I was really into skateboarding and I got into photography because we'd shoot each other all the time."

3 The moment that started it all...
"I saw Alice Cooper in Las Vegas at the original Joint, with Ted Nugent opening. I didn't play guitar yet, but as soon as I saw that gig I was like, 'man that was the coolest thing, I've got to play guitar'."

4 The one that got away...
"Recently, I walked into this killer vintage guitar shop in Stockholm and saw this '67 or a '68 Flying V on the wall. The neck was really big and it had a tremolo bar... it was incredible. I was thinking about it all night and the next day, now here I am just bummed out about it... I wanted it so bad!"

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"The other day, we had a whole Hello Cleveland moment. To get to the stage was an absolute maze nightmare. We went up and down some stairs, into a couple of caves, got chased by a massive boulder! But as far as malfunctions on stage, it's few and far between."

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"What's cool about playing with Slash is that he is constantly practising. He never plateaued; he's still getting better. Being around him, you really get that vibe and you just want to get better. But one of the best pieces of advice is to take things as slow as possible when you're practising. Let your brain wrap around it and eventually you're playing the part with ease."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"There's definitely some serious noodling, of course! But usually some Beatles, or some Beatles-y chords."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Coffee, that's pretty much it. There's also a lot of water. Lately, everybody in the band is grabbing a lot of coconut water – it's the new thing!"

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"I'm a huge fan of funk music. Besides playing Zeppelin riffs, I play funk all the time, just playing along with James Brown stuff... I'm a huge James Brown fan, and I love the way Nile Rodgers plays, too. As I've got older, I've begun to focus more on the right hand..."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"Gypsy jazz guitar. You've got to hit so hard down towards the bridge, you've got to use a big pick. It's a whole world that I'd love to delve into..."

Slash: always practising...

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